



The four little Blossoms loved to play in the orchard.

FOUR LITTLE BLOSSOMS
AT
SUNRISE BEACH

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"FOUR LITTLE BLOSSOMS THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS," ETC.

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Four Little Blossoms at Sunrise Beach

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FOUR LITTLE BLOSSOMS AT SUNRISE BEACH

CHAPTER I

NO MORE SCHOOL

BOBBY BLOSSOM stood at the top of the school steps and tossed his cap high into the air.

"Hurrah for a long vacation!" he shouted, with a jump that carried him over the steps, down to the ground, and brought him up beside a small, dark-eyed boy who was watching him with great admiration.

"Hurrah!" shrieked Bobby again. "I'm through school forever."

Meg, his sister, laughed and Twaddles and Dot laughed, too. Twaddles was the dark-eyed lad who had watched Bobby jump and he and

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Dot were the twin brother and sister of Bobby and Meg.

"You know school begins in September," said Meg. "It always begins in September; and you'll have to go then."

"Well, that's a long way off," Bobby declared comfortably.

"Ye-ow!" shouted somebody behind them. "No more school—ye-ow!"

The four little Blossoms turned. A boy was coming down the steps on his stomach and while it did not look as though he could be having a good time, he was laughing and shouting, so he must have been enjoying himself.

"That's Bertrand Ashe," said Dot, gazing at the boy with some disdain. "I never saw people make so much fuss about vacation in my life."

Now, Dot's life hadn't been so very long and this happened to be her first real vacation. She and Twaddles had just started to kindergarten the last half of the term and they were both secretly rather disappointed that school did not last all summer. The twins had a beautiful time in kindergarten. Father Blossom, when he

overheard Dot moaning that she wished school wouldn't close, had suggested that perhaps the kindergarten teacher needed a little rest.

A perfect flood of children seemed to come out of the school building now. They boiled and bubbled through the great double doors and poured down the steps. Bobby and Meg knew most of them.

"Where you going this summer?" asked Marion Green, coming up to Meg. "We're going to Maine. We're going to stay all summer. My aunt has a cottage right on the rocks and sometimes the spray comes in her parlor windows."

"Oh, my!" Twaddles gasped, staring. "Suppose you get drowned?"

"I won't get drowned," returned Marion confidently. "I'm very careful at the seashore. Are you going away, Meg?"

Meg's pretty blue eyes were puzzled.

"Why, I don't know," she said simply. "Most always we do go away, but Mother said this morning she hadn't decided. She likes our porch in the summer time."

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Marion hurried away to tell the other children about her summer plans and the four little Blossoms went through the yard gate and out into the shady street where the nicest of June breezes was blowing.

"Why didn't you tell Marion maybe we're going to Brookside Farm?" demanded Dot, trying to jump over a shadow cast by a swaying branch. Dot was always trying to jump over shadows and sometimes she could do it and more often she couldn't.

"We don't know that we're going," Meg answered patiently. "I'd rather go to Apple Tree Island."

"Brookside Farm for me," declared Bobby. "'Member Mr. Tom Sparks? And Aunt Polly and Linda and Jud? I think you can have more fun on a farm than any other place."

"No, you can't," Twaddles argued. "You haven't been to all the other places."

Meg pulled Dot back from the curb as a heavy car sped past them.

"Yes, but think of the fun we had on Apple Tree Island," said Meg. "I'd love to go in

Captain Jenks' motor-boat again. Perhaps this year I'd be big enough to run it."

Twaddles and Dot remembered Brookside Farm, where their kind Aunt Polly lived, most pleasantly. They, too, had spent a wonderful summer on Apple Tree Island. But they were quite sure that this summer they would not care to see either of these places.

"Where I'd like to go—" announced Twaddles cheerfully, "where I'd like to go—well, I'd like to go somewhere."

"Where we've never been before," Dot stipulated. "Maybe where no one has ever been before."

Bobby snorted. He frequently snorted at things his younger brother and sister said. Meg, in Bobby's estimation, had all the wisdom as far as the Blossom children were concerned. Bobby thought Meg was the dearest and wisest sister in all the world.

"I suppose you two would like to go exploring," said Bobby. "Take along some food and hunt for a new country."

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"North Poles and things like that," Twaddles agreed placidly.

"There's only one North Pole," Bobby instructed him. "One North Pole and one South Pole."

"We could take Philip with us," said Dot dreamily. "Philip and Annabel Lee."

Philip was the Blossom dog and Annabel Lee was the family cat and neither Bobby nor Meg liked to think of these faithful friends being dragged around with the twins on an exploring expedition.

"Dogs and cats aren't much help on an expedition," said Bobby. "They're domestic and they like to stay at home."

"I'm not domestic," Dot announced, "I like to go away from home."

Meg laughed and said she did, too.

"I like staying at home part of the time," she explained. "But it is fun to go away, too. Only I wouldn't want to explore. I want all of you to be where I am and I would like every one to be comfortable and happy."

"It's this way," said Bobby, sitting down to

rest on the stone coping that ran around Doctor Maynard's garden, "I hope we do go away, but not till after the Fourth of July. I want to see the fun in Oak Hill."

Meg and Twaddles and Dot sat down beside him, in a row.

"I don't see why you want to stay at home for Fourth of July," Twaddles murmured, intent on helping an ant along.

Twaddles' method of "helping" an ant, was to push it so fast the unfortunate creature turned over and over on its back.

"Why, it's going to be heaps of fun," said Bobby earnestly. "They're going to fire the big cannon in the park, Stanley Reeves told me."

Stanley was a high-school boy and what he said carried weight.

"They won't let you help fire the cannon," Twaddles insisted.

"Well, I can hear it, can't I?" said Bobby.

"There goes your ant," Dot remarked calmly.

"I believe he broke his neck."

The large black ant Twaddles had been assisting with such mistaken kindness had tumbled

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down a crack in the coping and disappeared from sight.

"Can ants break their necks?" demanded Twaddles, putting his eye to the crack and trying to see how deep it was.

"I don't believe they can," Meg answered him. "Twaddles, your face is streaked from your eye to your chin. Wipe it off."

Twaddles had, as usual, lost his handkerchief and had to borrow Bobby's.

"Is it off?" he asked, rubbing his face with an energy that threatened to take off his small snub nose as well as the dirt. "Is it off, Meg? Want your handkerchief back, Bobby?"

"Yes, of course I want it back," said Bobby, capturing his property. "Last time you borrowed my handkerchief you dropped it in the lake and I never did get it back."

"That was while we were at Apple Tree Island," and Twaddles grinned. "I'll bet the fish were surprised to find a handkerchief in the water."

"We have to go home," Meg reminded them,

rising. "Mother will be looking for us. Come on, Dot, what are you waiting for?"

"Twaddles," said Dot, without moving.

"Hey, Twaddles, what are you doing?" Bobby cried impatiently.

"I was looking for an ant," said Twaddles indignantly. "Can't a fellow look for an ant? I wanted to see if ants have necks to break."

"You can do it to-morrow," Meg assured him.

"Well, all right," he agreed amiably, and consented to trot along, down the tree-lined street, toward the comfortable house with a great many windows where the Blossoms lived.

"Sam's cutting the grass," said Bobby, as they came near enough to see the yard.

A man was pushing a lawn mower back and forth, with strong, easy thrusts of his long arms. Philip barked joyously as he caught sight of the children, and came rushing to meet them. Philip never failed to be surprised when the four little Blossoms came from school and he never failed to be delighted. Sam Layton said he thought he acted more delighted every day.

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"No more school, Sam!" cried Bobby, turning a handspring on the lawn.

"No more school, Sam!" Twaddles squeaked, trying to turn a handspring and flopping over on the grass within a foot of the lawn mower.

Sam leaned on the handle of the machine and surveyed the children with twinkling eyes.

"Have you been in the garage lately?" he inquired.

"Kittens!" Dot shrieked and set off on a run, the others trailing after her.

The last time Sam Layton had called their attention to the garage, Annabel Lee and three white kittens, established in state in a comfortable, padded box, had greeted their astonished eyes.

But no kittens could account for the noise that came from the garage a few minutes later. The four little Blossoms became four little Indians, prancing in the doorway.

"Oh! Oh, Sam!" they shouted. "Have you seen it? Is it ours?"

CHAPTER II

SUMMER PLANS

FOUR children, even if they are not very large children, can make a good deal of noise when, as Meg said, "they all make it at once." The four little Blossoms were all making a noise at once and in the house their mother and Norah heard them and came to the kitchen door to see what the matter was.

"Mother!" screamed Twaddles, as soon as he saw her. "Mother! Have you seen it? Does Daddy know about it?"

Mother Blossom nodded, smiling, but Norah pretended not to understand.

"What is it?" she said quickly. "What is it, Twaddles? Don't tell me there's an elephant hiding in the garage!"

"A sedan!" Bobby shouted. "A blue sedan, Norah. We've never had a closed car and this is a beauty."

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"Come look, Mother," pleaded Meg. "The cushions are blue, too! When did it come—while we were at school?"

Mother Blossom came down the back steps, her pink frock making a pretty splash of color against the green vines. Norah came, too, and Annabel Lee followed her. As a dignified cat, Annabel Lee always pretended not to be much interested in anything, but though she blinked her green eyes so sleepily, she managed to see everything that was going on.

Sam Layton had left his lawn mower and stood in the doorway of the garage.

"Seems to have upset the youngsters a bit," he commented teasingly. "Well, Dot, I suppose you're willing to lend me the new car when I go to Canada this summer; isn't it polite to lend your best things and keep the old ones for yourself?"

Poor Dot looked distressed. She wanted to be polite and she liked Sam Layton very much—he had lived with the Blossoms for years and he was patience and kindness itself; but, dear me,

how she did want to ride in that beautiful, new, shining sedan herself!

"You always said you couldn't get enough air in a closed car," said Dot slowly. "You said they're all right for people who have to coddle themselves, but give you an open car with the top down."

These were so exactly Sam's words and the others had heard them so often, that they laughed, while Sam beamed upon Dot and declared that he might have known he couldn't get the best of a girl who went to school.

"Come look at the cushions," begged Meg, tugging at her mother's hand.

Sam opened one of the doors and the children tumbled in. While they are looking at the surprise car, we shall take a few minutes to make sure you know them. It is quite possible that you have met the four little Blossoms before—Meg, whose real name was Margaret Alice Blossom; Bobby, who was Robert Hayward Blossom on the school rolls; and those smiling, busy twins, Twaddles and Dot, who were never called by their right names of Arthur Gifford

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and Dorothy Anna. In the first book about them, called "Four Little Blossoms at Brookside Farm," they all went to see their Aunt Polly Hayward, and a merry life they led her. But in spite of the adventures and mischief and noise, Aunt Polly was sorry to see them go. Of course she knew they had to go back to Oak Hill, where they lived, to go to school. Meg and Bobby went to school and the twins envied them, but during the holidays, Twaddles and Dot found they could share the fun of coasting and building snow-men and skating. Later, the following summer, when the four little Blossoms went to Apple Tree Island, every one of them shared in a bit of mystery that came out right and pleased them mightily. From the Island they came home again, to go to school as all good children do; and in the book just before this one, which is called "Four Little Blossoms through the Holidays," the busy days from Thanksgiving to New Year's seemed to fly past. Bobby and his friends got into a peck of trouble about a shop that burned down after they had been seen in it, but the matter was straightened

out finally, and Meg, who had a little trouble of her own, was made happy, too. Things always seemed to work out right for the four little Blossoms, and in the main they were as happy as the days were long.

They were very happy now, examining the new car. Bobby was sitting behind the wheel, pretending to drive, and Twaddles was advising him "about traffic," while Mother Blossom and Meg and Dot and Norah sat in the back, when somebody tall and dark appeared suddenly in the doorway.

"Daddy!" shouted the four little Blossoms in a chorus.

"I came home early, because I was asked to," said Father Blossom sadly, "and I think—I'm not sure, but I think—some one said we'd have dinner early, too; with strawberry shortcake, I believe."

Mother Blossom stepped down from the car, and patted his shoulder.

"I suppose you saw no one in the kitchen and thought we'd deserted you," she said. "We had

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to come out to see the new car, Daddy; the children are wild about it."

Sam Layton went back to finish cutting the grass and Norah hurried into the kitchen to make her shortcake. Father Blossom sat down on the running board of the new car and answered a great many questions. He was used to that and liked it.

"When did the car come?" asked Bobby.

"This afternoon, while you were at school," his daddy replied.

"Is it ours?" Dot inquired, just a bit fearful that some one had loaned her daddy the car or was keeping it in their garage.

"It's ours," said Father Blossom encouragingly.

"Do the doors have to be shut all the time?" Twaddles asked, and at the shout of laughter which greeted this remark, he looked indignant.

"Twaddles," said his father impressively, "when I think of the number of things you have managed to drop out of the old car, in past journeys, I wonder why I put off getting a closed car so long. Those doors stay shut while we are

on the road and something tells me we'll make better time than we ever have."

Even Twaddles had to grin a little. He knew as well as the rest that he had a bad habit of dropping his possessions along the road whenever he was out in the car. Every one, at some time or other, had had the experience of waiting while Twaddles went back and picked up something he had dropped.

"We're going to have dinner early, aren't we?" said Meg quietly.

"That's my practical daughter," Father Blossom chuckled. "Dinner early so that we can try out the new car. And then to-night we'll try to decide about our summer plans."

Dear me, this *was* pleasant. The four little Blossoms tore into the kitchen to help Norah, they said, but that excellent and patient person declared that if it was all the same to them she would prefer not to be helped.

"Go along with you," said Norah good-naturedly. "I know you're all mad to go off in the new car and just as soon as I get the shortcake out of the oven, dinner will be done; your

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father wouldn't miss a shortcake for twenty-two new cars."

This was quite true. When it came to that, the four little Blossoms did not want to miss one of Norah's shortcakes, either. As Twaddles remarked, it was rather nice to have a new car and a strawberry shortcake, too.

"Lots of nice things happen to us," said Meg soberly.

She said that again when, after dinner, they went for a drive in the shiny new car. Philip went with them, but Annabel Lee was not fond of motoring and she stayed at home with Norah and Sam.

"When I get big, I'll drive for you, Daddy," promised Bobby, as they rolled smoothly over the wide macadam road.

"No, I'll drive for you, Daddy," Twaddles interposed hastily. "Let me drive for you, Daddy."

"I'll accept both offers," said Father Blossom cheerfully. "And Meg and Dot may have their turns, too, if they feel like driving when they're seventeen."

The rest of the drive the four little Blossoms were planning how and where they would drive the car when they were old enough to take that fascinating wheel. Dot was all for going to California and Meg wanted to drive to Mexico, while the irrepressible Twaddles wanted to tour Europe and Bobby said that Alaska was a fine country and they ought to see the United States first.

"Alaska isn't in the United States," said Meg mildly.

"Well, we own it," Bobby declared and that settled that.

It was nearly dark when they turned in at their own drive and Sam was waiting to see that everything was all right before he "turned in," as he called going to bed.

"I didn't drop anything out," announced Twaddles, falling head first out of the car in his eagerness to report his good behavior.

"Well, I always said that good doors on a car were a grand invention," Sam replied, his eyes twinkling. "I see Fill-Up likes the new car, too."

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Sam would call Philip by that awful name and the four little Blossoms had long ago ceased trying to persuade him to use the dog's right name. Philip was the only one who didn't seem to mind. He was devoted to Sam and stayed with him all day while the children were at school, rode back and forth to the foundry with him, and went to Canada with him when Sam worked on a wheat farm there during the summer. Father Blossom owned a large foundry just outside the town and Sam drove him back and forth nearly every day.

"Now," said Father Blossom, as Mother Blossom turned on the porch lamp, "come and give me your very best advice. I have nine folders here and each time I read them I feel more muddled than before. Where shall we go this summer?"

He tossed a handful of gayly printed, colored folders into Mother Blossom's lap and the four little Blossoms crowded around her to look at them.

"L-a-k-e P-e-p-p-e-r-g-r-a-s-s," spelled Bobby carefully. "Where's that, Mother?"

"That's too far away," Mother Blossom assured him. "Daddy might want to come back to Oak Hill once or twice while we're gone and we can not make it too hard for him."

"Here's a picture of a cave," said Dot hopefully. "I would like to live in a cave, Mother."

"Darling, you couldn't live in that cave," Mother Blossom assured her. "It's a huge place and tourists are always passing through to see the rocks in it. You wouldn't like to be sleeping and have a dozen strangers walk over you, would you?"

Dot said no, she wouldn't like that, and then Meg picked up a green and white card with a picture of a beach and children running about on it in their bathing suits.

"I think the seashore is lovely," said Meg, trying to read the green and white print on the card.

"Now then, Daughter, Mother and I have been talking about that very place," Father Blossom declared. "It's called Sunrise Beach and it's about as near as any place on the Atlantic Coast. There is a fine beach, safe for you children, and some one told Mother that it is quiet without be-

ing lonely. If Mother is satisfied, I think we might as well decide to go there."

Mother Blossom smiled and that meant she was willing.

"When, Mother, when?" shouted Twaddles, who shouted when he was excited. "When can we go, Mother? To-morrow, Mother?"

"Oh, no, Mother, not till after the Fourth of July," Bobby begged. "We have to see the celebration, Mother. They're going to shoot off the cannon in the park, Mother."

"Please, please!" said Mother Blossom, covering her ears with her hands.

"I don't think we can possibly get away till after the Fourth," she explained, when it was quiet. "I'll have to write to a hotel for our rooms and Daddy has some business to settle before he can go. Yes, we'll be here in Oak Hill for the celebration, Bobby. You may count on that."

The next few days were busy enough to suit even the four little Blossoms, who had thought that when school closed they would have nothing to do.

Bobby and Meg were much concerned with what Sam Layton called their "financial arrangements." They were saving their money for fireworks and the twins were altogether too deeply interested in the two tin banks, according to Bobby and Meg's way of thinking.

"Twaddles shakes my bank every morning," Bobby complained. "He thinks he can tell how much money there is in it by shaking it."

"Let us go with you to buy the things?" asked Dot every day. "Say, Bobby, let us go with you to buy the things?"

"If you don't ask me again, you can go," the long-suffering Bobby finally said. "Don't say 'Let us go with you to buy the things?' once more, and I'll tell you when we're ready."

So that was a bargain and the twins contented themselves with tagging after Meg and Bobby silently.

"Didn't it rain in the night!" said Meg one morning at breakfast.

"Did it?" asked Bobby anxiously. "I'd better go and look at my water wheel."

Bobby always slept soundly and he had not

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heard the rain. But he knew a heavy storm would be apt to damage the wheel he had built in the little brook that ran through a field not far from the house. He had worked hard over this wheel and when it was finished the whole family had gone down to look at it. Bobby had almost decided to become an inventor when he grew up.

"I'll go with you," offered Twaddles.

Meg and Dot had to try on new dresses Mother Blossom was making for them, so they could not go. But as soon as breakfast was over, Bobby and Twaddles hurried off to the brook.

"Gee, look how high it is!" said Bobby, as soon as he saw the muddy water.

The brook had risen several inches and the grass along the sides was slippery from mud and rain. Twaddles began to run toward the water wheel which was bobbing crazily up and down, and before Bobby could call to him to be careful, the younger lad's feet slipped and he pitched into the water, head first!

CHAPTER III

FIRE! FIRE!

“**B**OBBY! Oh, Daddy, Daddy!” poor Twaddles screamed, floundering around blindly, for mud and water poured into his eyes if he opened them for an instant.

“Take me out!” he roared more loudly as he got his breath. “Bobby! I’m drowning! Take me out!”

The more he roared, the more wildly he splashed and thrashed about in the water. Bobby, standing on the bank, was showered with spray and he could not make Twaddles hear him because of the noise the unfortunate child was making.

“Will you keep still?” shrieked Bobby, losing his temper at last. “You’re not drowning—you can’t drown because there isn’t enough water. Stop yelling and I’ll pull you out.”

Twaddles opened one eye. Bobby held out

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his hand. Twaddles plowed through the yellow water and grabbed the hand so quickly that he almost succeeded in pulling Bobby down on top of him. But Bobby drew back just in time. He gave a sharp jerk, and out came the dripping Twaddles.

"I slipped," announced that young person, with his own cheerful grin.

"I should think you did slip," Bobby said severely. "You are one sight. Come on, you'll have to take a bath and put on another suit."

"I don't need a bath—I'm wet all over now," protested Twaddles. "Let's look at the water wheel."

But Bobby hustled him up to the house where, as he had foreseen, a bath and clean clothes were ordered for the unlucky Twaddles. The water wheel, Bobby found later, was broken in two places, and he spent the rest of that day repairing it.

"Well, it's almost Fourth of July," remarked Meg with great satisfaction when she tore off the large "June" sheet on the kitchen calendar.

Meg had charge of all the calendars in the

house. She tore off the one on her mother's desk every day and the one in the living room once a week. Then, every month there was the calendar in the kitchen and the one in the garage and one in the upstairs hall to be torn off. It really kept Meg busy "being up to date" as Sam said.

"We're going to buy our things to-day," said Bobby to Dot, mindful of his promise. "Want to go?"

Did they want to go? Why, Dot and Twaddles wouldn't have missed going downtown to buy fireworks for anything. They had a quarter apiece to spend, too, and they knew exactly what they meant to buy. Dot wanted "snakes" and Twaddles a cap pistol.

"You're really too young for a cap pistol," said Bobby on the way down to the hardware store where the very best fireworks in the town were for sale. "When I was your age I didn't have a cap pistol."

"That's because I'm smarter than you were," Twaddles assured him, and for that Bobby chased him the length of a block.

Bobby and Meg thought that next to Christ-

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mas shopping, buying fireworks for the Fourth of July was the nicest way to spend money that had ever been invented. When they found themselves in Mr. Brick's hardware store, they felt as they did at Christmas time—they wanted everything they saw and it would have been easy to spend a hundred dollars if they had had it to spend.

"Oh-h, look at the rockets!" said Meg, staring happily at the long wooden sticks.

"Daddy said he'd get some things to set off at night," Bobby reminded her. "We'd better get things to burn in the day time."

Twaddles and Dot were wandering up and down, looking at everything they saw. They were just as much interested in the nails and saws and hammers and screws as they were in the fireworks; indeed, Dot would have liked to open every one of the little wooden drawers that reached from the floor to the ceiling and see what each one held.

Bobby wanted firecrackers, a cap pistol and of course plenty of punk. Meg was eager for "baby firecrackers," a box or two of the silver

snakes that Dot liked so much, and "sparklers."

They bought these things and then had to go in search of the twins, whom they found watching one of the clerks sharpening knives on a grindstone.

"Hurry up and get your fireworks," urged Bobby. "We're all through."

Dot hastily bought as many snakes as she could get for twenty-five cents, while Twaddles insisted on seeing all the cap pistols before he could make up his mind which one he wanted. He stuffed the boxes of caps in his pocket and spilled them along the street on his way home. But he did not fire one, nor did Bobby, because that was their agreement with Father Blossom; they had promised not to celebrate the Fourth of July in advance, as some children do.

Once home, they put their fireworks carefully away and only looked at them now and then.

"How often is now and then?" asked Norah when she heard this.

"Well, before breakfast and before we go to bed," Bobby explained. "And if we happen to wonder whether they are getting damp or—or

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anything—then we look at them, too. Just to make sure they are all right.”

It was the next afternoon, however, that something happened which made the four little Blossoms forget their precious fireworks for a time. They were playing in the shady yard and Father Blossom had just driven in unexpectedly to get some papers he had left in one of his coats. The children were playing the “Magic Carpet” game which Meg had invented and which was a fine play for a warm afternoon, because they sat on a rug under one of the trees and pretended to be traveling through the air. Twaddles was telling what he saw as the rug passed over Africa and he was all ready to shoot a lion when suddenly a tremendous whistle began to blow.

“Fire!” shouted Bobby, scrambling to his feet as he recognized the town fire whistle.

Father Blossom came running out of the house and an automobile shot past the house at terrific speed.

“That was Chief Fields!” cried Bobby. “Hurry up, Daddy—I guess it is a big fire.”

Bobby was already on the running board of

the car which had been left standing in the drive.

"Get in, Son," said Father Blossom. "No, Twaddles—the rest of you stay here; we'll come and tell you about it afterward. Twaddles, you can't go! Keep Dot clear of the wheels, Meg."

He backed the car swiftly while Meg held on to Dot's skirts and Twaddles openly wept with wrath and disappointment.

"Can't watch Twaddles at a fire," said Father Blossom, as he turned the car in the direction of the town. "Did you hear anything then, Bobby?"

Bobby was leaning forward, almost on top of the windshield. His eyes were shining with excitement.

"It sounded like an explosion, Daddy," he answered quickly.

The Blossom house was on the edge of the town, but within a few minutes Mr. Blossom and Bobby found themselves on the main street. The next instant Bobby uttered a cry as something bright and blazing shot past the car.

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"A rocket!" he shrieked. "Daddy, that was a rocket! It must be fireworks on fire!"

Then they heard the sputtering and popping of firecrackers and saw a black cloud of smoke ahead through which Roman candles and sky rockets were bursting, to fall on the people who were watching and who tried in vain to duck to safety.

"Why—why, it's the hardware store!" said Bobby, as he realized which building was on fire. "Daddy, it's Mr. Brick's store! Where we bought our fireworks!"

The street before the hardware store was choked with people, cars and the town fire apparatus. The firemen were doing their best, but there was no one to help them keep the crowd back. Not even the bursting Roman candles nor the truly thrilling sight of the skyrockets that shot high into the air could keep the people from getting as close to the fire as the heat allowed them.

"Stay on this side of the street," said Father Blossom to Bobby, stopping the car. "If we can't do anything to help, at least we can keep

out of the firemen's way. Listen to the racket!"

Bobby began to wish that Meg and the twins had come. Of course he didn't want Mr. Brick's store to burn, but as long as it was on fire, it was interesting to see and hear fireworks go off. The firecrackers popped and sizzled and every so often a huge giant firecracker exploded with a heavy roar.

The firemen were trying to save as much of the hardware stock as they could and presently Bobby saw two of them coming towards the car with a large wooden box.

"Can we put this in your car, Mr. Blossom?" they asked, their faces so streaked with smoke and dirt that Bobby couldn't tell who they were, though he knew nearly every fireman in the town by name.

"I guess it's something pretty valuable and we're afraid to leave it any place," said one of the men. "In a crowd like this there is always some one ready to steal stuff if you don't watch."

"We'll take care of it for you—put it in the back," said Father Blossom, opening the rear door of the car.

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The men put the box down with a thud and ran back to the fire.

"Is it fireworks, do you think?" asked Bobby, looking at the box respectfully.

"I hardly think so," his daddy answered. "It's more apt to be some valuable tools. I hope Mr. Brick has enough insurance to cover this, for it looks to me as though the store is to be a total loss."

A dozen skyrocketers apparently went off the next moment and a woman in the crowd shrieked. Bobby was trying to see who it was and whether she had been hurt, when he found himself sniffing.

"Why—why—why, I smell smoke!" he thought hastily.

Of course the air was heavy with smoke, but this was different. This was a blue thin smoke and it was not coming from the fire. Bobby turned and looked at the box on the floor of the car.

"Daddy, that box is on fire!" he cried, as he saw smoky spirals curling through the cracks of the box. "Look, the valuable box is on fire!"

Valuable or not, Father Blossom did not hesitate. He opened the door of the car and pitched out that box. It crashed to the ground and more smoke poured from it.

"We've got a little fire of our own, it seems," said Father Blossom grimly.

He opened his tool box and took his small hatchet from among the tools. With a few quick strikes he had splintered one side of the box, while Bobby danced about in a perfect fever of uncertainty and excitement.

"Where are the valuable tools?" he demanded as his father began to tramp out the fire with his heavy shoes.

Father Blossom glanced at him queerly. Bobby bent closer to look. There was no more smoke and he stared at what he saw. Then, catching his father's eye, Bobby began to laugh.

"Ha-ha!" he laughed, and Father Blossom sat down on the running board and laughed with him.

CHAPTER IV

FOURTH OF JULY

THE next moment a short sharp blast of the fire whistle announced that the fire was out.

"What's so funny?" asked a tired fireman, stopping as he dragged a length of hose past the car, to stare at Bobby and his daddy so gayly laughing.

"This box," chuckled Bobby, pointing to the splintered boards on the ground. "Two of the firemen left it in our car because they thought it was valuable; and there's nothing in it but sawdust!"

The fireman grinned and bent down to examine the sawdust.

"I saw Tim and Ed carrying that box," he said. "They found it down cellar. I suppose Brick was saving the sawdust to use."

The moment the fire was over, the watching

crowd remembered other things they had to do. The cars untangled themselves, the people disappeared, and the quiet street looked just as usual except for the streams of water in the gutter and the blackened front of the hardware store.

Most of the children in Oak Hill had bought their fireworks before the fire and Mr. Brick had more stored in an old ice house which he owned. So Father Blossom did not have to send away for the night fireworks he had planned to buy.

Twaddles and Dot were sure they would never get over the disappointment of not seeing the fire and they thought it was a little too much to have a box of sawdust on fire in their own daddy's car when they were not there to enjoy the excitement. However, by Fourth of July morning, the twins were feeling better and before Twaddles had shot off three caps he was his usual cheerful self.

The town celebration was set for ten o'clock and was to be held at the park, a square in the center of the village, opposite the post-office and

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the tall flagpole. Twaddles wanted to take his cap pistol, but was finally persuaded that the cannon would furnish enough noise.

"Philip doesn't want to go," reported Dot, coming in to breakfast with a piece of lighted punk in one hand and a sparkler in the other.

"I don't blame the poor doggie," Mother Blossom said quickly. "Let him stay quietly in the garage—all dogs hate the noise of Fourth of July. Leave your punk on the porch, dear."

It had been decided that Father Blossom would drive them to the celebration, not because the walk was too long—they often walked farther than that—but because he said he could keep four children in one spot if he had them in a car. Otherwise, Father Blossom declared, he would not be surprised to see Twaddles come shooting out of the cannon when they fired it, or see Dot mounting to the top of the flagpole with the flag.

Mother Blossom, Meg, and Dot were all in white when they came out to get into the car. Twaddles looked very nice also in his brown linen blouse and knickers. But no one knew

how Bobby looked because he wasn't there to be looked at.

"Where's Bobby?" asked Father Blossom, from the doorway of the garage where he had been looking over the tires of the old car with Sam.

"I haven't seen him since breakfast," Mother Blossom replied, a little anxiously. "Do you know where he is, Meg?"

Meg shook her head.

"He's the one who has talked most about the celebration," said Father Blossom. "I thought he'd be on hand and teasing to start. Bobby! Where are you, Bobby?"

No Bobby answered, though Father Blossom called again.

"Run into the house, Twaddles, and see if you can find him," commanded Mother Blossom. "Tell him we are ready to go."

Twaddles dashed into the house and they could hear him shouting. Norah in the kitchen went placidly on with her work. Norah was fond of saying that it took a big noise to distract her attention.

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"He says he isn't coming," reported Twaddles, rushing out again and climbing into the car.

"Not coming!" echoed Mother Blossom and Meg. "Why, Twaddles, what do you mean?"

"That's what he said," Twaddles insisted. "He said for us to go on without him."

At this moment Bobby himself came out on the porch.

"I thought I wouldn't go," he said slowly, while his family stared at him in amazement.

Mother Blossom was stepping down from the car, but his daddy reached Bobby first.

"What's the matter, Son?" he asked gently, putting his arm around him.

To Bobby's horror, tears began to run down his cheeks.

"I—I burned my finger!" he choked. "It hurts a lot!"

Well, his only mistake was in not telling about the burned finger, for his mother had some wonderful stuff that took all the fire and pain out of the burn as soon as she put it on. When she had wrapped the finger in a soft bandage

and Norah had brought him some ice cold grape juice to drink—Norah believed that any one who was hurt must also be hungry or thirsty—and he had put on a clean blouse, Bobby felt as good as new and was ready to go to the celebration.

They found the square surrounded by parked cars and the band on the bunting-draped platform was playing "Columbia the Gem of the Ocean" as they drove up.

"They haven't fired the cannon yet," said Bobby happily.

It must be confessed that there was not much to interest the four little Blossoms till the time for firing the cannon came. There were several long and patriotic speeches read, the band played once or twice, and a girl in a white dress and a red, white and blue sash, recited the Declaration of Independence. She had learned it all by heart, and Meg, who liked to recite at the exercises in school, wondered how she could remember so many words.

Then, at last, the great cannon was wheeled into position and it thundered twenty-one times, while Mother Blossom covered her ears and

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Bobby and Twaddles shouted themselves hoarse.

"I'm glad we didn't go to Sunrise Beach before to-day," said Bobby, on the way home. "I wouldn't have missed that cannon for anything."

Norah and Sam and Philip and Annabel Lee at home, had heard the cannon. Sam reported that the cat and dog had rushed under the floor of the garage and Norah said the dishes on her pantry shelves jumped and rattled.

You know, if you have been to Fourth of July celebrations, how very hungry it makes you to listen to other people speak. Norah knew this, and she had a wonderful dinner ready for the Blossoms—with red, white and blue ice-cream for dessert, if you please! Father Blossom said he was afraid Twaddles would be in no condition to fire off caps that afternoon, but he was mistaken; in spite of two helpings of ice cream, Twaddles worked every minute till supper time, putting caps in his pistol and firing them off. He had energy enough, too, to help Dot with her snakes and he even tried two or three of Meg's sparklers. But Bobby wouldn't let him touch his big firecrackers—he said that when he

was the age of Twaddles no one allowed him to handle firecrackers.

As soon as it was dark they all gathered on the front steps to watch Father Blossom set off the Roman candles and the skyrocketes and the pin-wheels. Each little Blossom, with daddy watching carefully, was allowed to touch punk to a pyramid of "colored fire" and as the beautiful red and green and blue lights sprayed over the lawn, Mother Blossom said she thought they were nicer than the kind of fireworks that made a noise.

Even Fourth of July must come to an end and when the last pin-wheel was a blackened bit of ashes, it was time for bed.

"But, anyway, we have to get ready to go to Sunrise Beach," said Meg sleepily, as they climbed the stairs. "If Fourth of July lasted longer than one day we wouldn't have time to celebrate, for we have to help Mother pack."

Now this was all very well, but after the four little Blossoms had spent the next day "helping" and Meg had forgotten where she put Twaddles' new socks and Bobby had spilled furniture pol-

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ish on the hardwood floor and the twins had tried to wash Annabel Lee and gotten themselves sadly scratched for their pains, Mother Blossom and Norah decided that they could manage nicely without so much help.

"I'll tell you what you do," suggested Norah. "Take this nice clean pail and see if you can't get me a mess of wild strawberries. Your father is fond of wild strawberry shortcake and he hasn't had one this summer. If you wait much longer, the wild berries will be gone."

"We'd better take something to eat with us," Meg said cautiously. "The last time we went after berries, Twaddles ate every one he picked because he was so hungry."

Twaddles looked indignant, but made no denial.

"I didn't have much breakfast that day," he explained.

Norah said they might take some sandwiches, and while she was spreading bread with peanut butter, Dot ran up to her room and hastily selected one of her dolls.

"I'm going to take Betty with me and see if

she gets some freckles," she told Meg. "Linda, on Aunt Polly's farm, has freckles and she gets them from staying in the sun."

Meg didn't think that dolls freckled, but she couldn't be sure because she had never tried the experiment.

"What's that in your pocket?" asked Twaddles of Bobby, when they had started for the fields some distance from the house, Dot carrying her doll and Meg carrying the sandwiches, while Twaddles banged the pail against his ankles at every step.

"It's my mechanical book," said Bobby. "I might want to make something before we get back."

Bobby was very proud of his "mechanical book." It had helped him build his water wheel and he was never tired of reading it or looking at the pictures it contained.

The field where the wild strawberries grew thickest was about half a mile from the house where the four little Blossoms lived. It was a beautiful meadow, with groups of oak trees dotting it and buttercups and daisies growing in

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the grass. Dividing it through the center was a straggling fence and for some reason or other the children always found more berries along this fence than in any one other place.

"Airplane!" called Meg, when they had been picking for just a few minutes.

Meg could hear the drone of an airplane before any one else.

"I see it!" Bobby cried, tilting back his head to stare into the sunny sky.

"Gee, it's flying low!" This from Twaddles.

The next instant Meg and Bobby scrambled to their feet and dragged Twaddles and Dot after them as they fled toward a large oak tree. The air was filled with the loud noise of the airplane motor and poor Dot cried out in fright as the great birdlike machine hovered over them and cast its shadow on the green grass.

"It's coming down on our heads!" screamed Dot, trying to run faster and failing, because she was already running at top speed.

CHAPTER V

A FLYING FRIEND

THE four little Blossoms really thought the airplane was coming down on top of them and they thought so till they had reached the shelter of the tree. Then, for the first time, they dared look at the plane and they saw they had been mistaken.

For the airplane was making a beautiful landing in the open meadow. As the children watched it, the motor stopped and a man, his face half hidden by huge leather goggles, stepped out as calmly as though he might be stepping out of his own front door.

"Gee!" gasped Twaddles, out of breath and scarlet-faced from running. "Look at him!"

Bobby started for the machine and the others followed him swiftly.

"Keep away from it," ordered Bobby over his

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shoulder, but no one listened. They all meant to get as close to that airplane as they could.

"Hello!" said the aviator, who was bending over the propeller when they reached him. "Where did you drop from?"

He had taken off his goggles and they could see that he was young, with a deeply tanned face and very clear gray eyes.

"Is it broken?" asked Bobby.

"Do you like to fly in it?" Meg inquired.

"Were you ever killed?" asked Dot, too much interested to think how her question sounded.

"What are all the funny little things for?" Twaddles demanded as one expert to another.

The aviator reached out a long leather-covered arm and picked Twaddles off the nose of the airplane.

"You keep out!" he commanded briefly. "I can mend engine trouble but I can't put small boys together again, once they get mashed."

Twaddles stood back a little, but Meg was sure he was only waiting his chance to make another close inspection of the machine.

"We were picking strawberries, and we saw

you coming," said Bobby. "We're the four Blossom children. We thought you were going to land on our heads."

"I saw you running," the aviator admitted. "Sorry if I frightened you. I wanted to find out what was wrong and this looked like a good place to make a landing. I'm Tom Jackson and when I'm at home I live in California."

Then he seemed to feel that they knew each other and became very busy indeed tinkering with his engine.

"Where's Twaddles?" whispered Meg to Bobby a moment later.

Dot pointed silently. A pair of tan sandals were waving in the air and Twaddles was apparently standing on his head inside the cockpit of the airplane.

Almost as soon as Bobby saw him, Tom Jackson saw him, too. With an exclamation, he dropped his tools and strode toward the waving shoes.

"When I say stay out, I mean stay out," he announced, lifting Twaddles by his blue blouse. "You're worse than the crowds on the landing

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fields. Let's see, where shall I put you to keep you out of mischief?"

"Don't," begged Meg in alarm. "Don't put him anywhere, Mr. Jackson. Bobby and I will take care of him."

"Will you promise to keep a tight grip on him till I can get away from here?" Tom Jackson asked, frowning.

Bobby and Meg promised and each took one of Twaddles' hands. They watched silently while the aviator continued to work over his engine and not even when it burst into a terrific roar would Meg drop Twaddles' hand, though he complained he needed it to put over his ear and shut out the noise.

"I thought there would be some curious people passing by presently," said Tom Jackson, glancing over his shoulder. "Well, I'll be off before they get too near. Good-by, youngsters, and take my advice and tie a string on that child when an airplane lands within half a mile of him."

He smiled forgivingly at Twaddles, however, who smiled placidly back. Then Tom Jackson

adjusted his goggles, waved to the four little Blossoms, stepped into his seat, and that beautiful white-winged ship of his ran gracefully down the field and soared into the air.

"Oh-h, how lovely!" breathed Meg, with a little sigh.

Half a dozen men and boys hurried up and began to ask questions. They were the "people" the aviator had seen coming and the four little Blossoms thought he was probably glad to be flying up among the clouds before they had had time to talk to him.

"Why didn't you make him give you a ride?" said one of the boys to Bobby, and Twaddles suddenly flashed a mischievous grin that made Meg uneasy.

"Though I don't see what he could do to an airplane," she thought, as they walked back to get the strawberries and the pail.

But a half hour later, when they had finished picking berries, Meg understood what Twaddles had been grinning about.

"Where's Betty?" demanded Dot. "I put her down in the sun to get some freckles on her."

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"Where's my book?" Bobby asked hastily. "My mechanical book. Anybody seen my mechanical book? I thought I left it under that little tree."

"I carried 'em for you," said Twaddles sweetly, "when we were running away from the airplane that chased us."

"It didn't chase us," Bobby corrected him. "Well, then, where is my book now? What did you do with it?"

Twaddles glanced uncertainly at him.

"I put it in the airplane," he confessed.

"In the airplane!" cried three of the four little Blossoms.

"And Betty, too," Twaddles added, thinking he might as well let the worst be known.

Even Bobby was speechless, and Twaddles went on to explain.

"I wanted to give them a ride," he stated. "I knew Tom Jackson wouldn't give us a ride—maybe he couldn't take us all in the airplane, anyway. But a doll and a book don't take up much room, and now they're flying."

"We'll never see them again, either," said Bobby gloomily.

"I think you might have put something of your own in the airplane," Meg scolded mildly. "That doll and the book didn't belong to you."

"I didn't have anything to put," said Twaddles, and as this was quite true and they all felt a little thrill to think of Betty and the book sailing away through the air and high above the earth, Bobby and Dot did not quarrel with Twaddles.

Indeed, they were so busy the next day or two, getting ready for their trip, that they almost forgot the airplane, and that, said Sam Layton, was a sign they were very busy indeed. Sam was to take Philip and the old car and go to Canada as he had done the summer before. Norah was to stay in the house and keep it open and take care of Annabel Lee. She declared that she looked forward to a few peaceful weeks, but the morning the four little Blossoms were to start their journey, she baked waffles for their breakfast and said she didn't see how she was going to get along without them.

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"I wish," remarked Twaddles when, every one and everything stowed neatly in the car, his father took the wheel and the auto started, "we were going to Sunrise Beach in an airplane."

Mother Blossom laughed and said a new car was far nicer.

"Besides," chuckled Father Blossom, "if you should drop something out of an airplane, Twaddles, you'd never be able to get out and go back to pick it up."

This made the others laugh and for the first few miles the four little Blossoms amused themselves by imagining the various things Twaddles might drop out of an airplane and what the people on the streets would say if these things came tumbling down on their surprised heads.

They had lunch in a pretty tea room where Twaddles created a commotion by falling out of the low French window—that came down to the floor—and rolling full length into a long green flower box. He wasn't hurt, and one of the waitresses felt so sorry for him she brought him an extra plate of pink ice cream and Bobby

was heard to say that Twaddles had all the luck.

"And to think a boy like that wants to go in an airplane," said Father Blossom, stowing his family in the car again after luncheon. "Why, Twaddles, if you know when you are well off, you'll keep your two feet firmly on this good safe earth."

Bobby liked to watch the mileage as it was ticked off, and by the time thoughts of a good hot dinner were beginning to interest the Blossoms he announced that they had driven one hundred and forty-seven miles since morning.

"We must find a good place to spend the night," said Mother Blossom. "I don't want Dot to go to sleep until she has had her dinner. What about the Mountain House, Daddy?"

"I don't know much about it," Father Blossom answered over his shoulder, "but as it's the nearest, we'd better put up there. I'll have to have a tire changed."

Twaddles and Dot immediately set themselves to watch for the mountain and they refused to believe that their daddy had found the right hotel when he drove up to a large, comfortable-

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looking white house, set in a flat mat of green grass and surrounded on all sides by flat vegetable gardens.

"I don't believe this is the place, either, Daddy," worried Bobby.

"Yes, it is, there's the sign," Meg said, pointing to a black and gold sign that read "The Mountain House" quite plainly.

The twins, though disappointed, had no mind to be left in the car, so they hopped out and went up the steps and sat down on the suitcases in the hall while Father Blossom went to the desk to see about rooms and Mother Blossom waited with Bobby and Meg near them.

"All right," said Father Blossom, coming back with a boy who gathered up the luggage. "We'll go upstairs and dinner will be ready as soon as we are."

They had two pleasant rooms on the second floor and it was decided that Mother Blossom and Meg and Dot would share one and let "the three boys" have the other.

"I'm just as hungry!" confided Dot, as they

went down the wide staircase, after washing away the traces of their long drive.

"That's the way we like people to be," a cheerful old gentleman standing in the hall looked up and assured her.

They were all hungry and no one noticed that Twaddles wasn't eating as heartily as usual. He would take a bite and then stare away into space. He was thinking, but his family did not know that.

Then, just as the waiter was bringing the dessert, Twaddles startled every one within ear-shot by giving a tremendous sigh.

"I know how it is," he declared, waving his spoon in a manner that distressed Mother Blossom. "Daddy told me about cottage pudding—there isn't any cottage, it's just a name. And here's the Mountain House and there isn't any mountain, that's just a name, too!"

Meg giggled, but Dot looked impressed.

"I never thought of that," she admitted.

After driving one hundred and forty-seven miles on a hot July day, even Twaddles and Dot were too sleepy to argue about bed time.

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They were in dreamland five minutes after Mother Blossom had helped them take their baths and had tucked them in bed. Meg and Bobby, too, went to sleep so quickly both declared the next morning they didn't remember going to bed.

But they remembered waking up. Bobby surely did, and so did Meg, for the first thing she heard was peals of laughter from the next room, where Father Blossom and the two boys were.

"They'll wake every one in the house!" said Mother Blossom, sitting up in bed to listen.

CHAPTER VI

BILLY RAYMOND

"I'LL bet it's Twaddles," Dot declared wisely, tumbling out of her cot and beginning to dress hastily.

Well, it was Twaddles. That young man knocked at the door fifteen minutes later and came in to ask his mother if she had the whisk broom.

"What are you making such a noise about in there?" asked Mother Blossom, giving him the whisk broom and a kiss at the same time. She always said she had to kiss Twaddles when he was sleepy, or he was apt to make a fuss.

Twaddles grinned and sidled toward the door.

"Oh, nothing—much," he said, and vanished.

But at the breakfast table Bobby gave the secret away.

"You ought to have heard Twaddles this

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morning," chuckled Bobby, while Twaddles was suddenly very busy eating oatmeal.

"He woke Daddy and me up yelling to us to put on the light—and it was half-past six and as light as—as light as—well, you know how light it is at half-past six."

"Why did he want the light?" Dot inquired curiously.

"He thought it was night," explained Bobby. "He was under his cot and it was pitch dark. He thought it was night and he kept thrashing around under the blanket."

Mother Blossom looked puzzled.

"Why should he be under the cot?" she asked.

"Well, Mother, I know you expect your children to sleep on top of their cots," said Father Blossom seriously. "But it seems that last night after we were asleep, Twaddles decided he would like to pretend he was camping out. So he wrapped himself in the sheet and crawled under his cot and went to sleep on the floor."

"Yes, and it grew cold in the night, and Daddy got up to put a blanket over him," Bobby went on. "Daddy couldn't see and he thought Twad-

dles was in the cot, but the blanket hung down to the floor and shut poor old Twaddles in like a tent. When he woke up this morning he was in the pitch dark."

"It was hot in there, too," said Twaddles, speaking for the first time.

"Poor lamb, you might have smothered," Mother Blossom worried. "That was bad enough without having to be laughed at, wasn't it, dear?"

"Oh, Mother, we had to laugh!" protested Bobby. "You ought to have heard Twaddles kicking around on the floor and yelling for Daddy to turn on the light, and Daddy looking all over for Twaddles and wondering where he was."

Mother Blossom said they must watch Twaddles more carefully another time—she didn't want any of her children to sleep on the hard floor.

Then, as they had finished breakfast, they said good-by to the Mountain House (where there was no mountain) and started on the second day of their journey to Sunrise Beach.

The twins had been promised the front seat this time, and they rode beside their daddy, while Meg and Bobby sat with Mother Blossom. Twaddles was trying to count the bridges—the road seemed to be crossed by a great many small streams and there was a little wooden bridge over each brook and creek—and Dot was singing to herself, when Meg made a discovery.

"What in the world is this?" said Meg.

She drew a paper bundle from under the seat. It was not very skillfully tied up and it was the trailing end of the string that had attracted Meg's attention.

"I never saw that before," said Bobby.

Twaddles squirmed around in the front seat to see what they were looking at.

"That's mine," he informed them.

"What's in it?" asked Bobby suspiciously.

"Nothing much," Twaddles said uneasily.

"It's my lunch."

Father Blossom began to laugh, but Mother Blossom picked up the bundle.

"Twaddles," she said firmly, "just what is in this package?"

"Well, now, Mother," Twaddles answered, "I didn't eat much breakfast and I felt kind of worried about myself. So when I went out into the garage and saw a man there eating something, I asked him what he was eating. He was eating cherries and he said I could buy some. I had the quarter Daddy gave me and I bought some cherries. You can all eat them," finished Twaddles, in a burst of generosity.

"It feels pretty heavy for cherries," said Bobby thoughtfully.

Mother Blossom tore off a corner of the paper.

"Green apples," she announced. "Twaddles, some one has played a trick on you and sold you green apples for your quarter. Never mind, I don't think you will starve to death before we come to a place where we can have lunch."

Twaddles seemed to be anxious, but when they stopped at a roadside stand in the blazing heat of the noon-day sun, the sight of sandwiches and ice-cold ginger ale made him feel better.

"Now you haven't any quarter," Dot re-

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mind him, as they drank their ginger ale through long straws.

"What are you going to buy with yours?" asked Twaddles eagerly.

Dot said she hadn't made up her mind, and though Twaddles drew her attention to chocolates and popcorn and toy airplanes, for sale at the stand, Dot declared she meant to save her money.

"Anyway, Daddy said we shouldn't buy things to eat without asking Mother," Dot reminded Twaddles, "and all you bought were green apples that no one can eat."

It was so warm, even when they were again on the road, that the twins found it impossible to keep their eyes open. They tumbled into the back seat and went to sleep with their heads on Mother Blossom's lap. Even Meg—who felt quite grown up when she compared herself to Twaddles and Dot—dozed with her face pressed against her mother's shoulder.

Bobby, however, was wide awake. He sat beside his daddy and watched the farms they passed and the other cars. Bobby thought

proudly that their new car looked nicer than any other he saw.

They had driven through a small town—Father Blossom said he didn't know positively, but he thought it must be Wickerville and Bobby looked it up on the map and that was right—and were in the country again when Bobby noticed a boy walking down the road ahead of them.

"Daddy, there's a boy," he said quickly.

"Shall we give him a lift?" asked Father Blossom, who liked boys very much and thought he had two of the best right in his own family. He sometimes said so.

"Oh, yes, let's!" Bobby agreed with enthusiasm.

"Going our way?" said Father Blossom pleasantly, stopping the car. "We'd like to take you in out of this hot sun, if you're heading in our direction."

The boy glanced up, squinting in the bright sunshine. He carried a bundle tied up in a blue and white checked handkerchief and his face was brick red from sunburn.

"You're real kind," he said a little shyly. "I don't mind if I do get a lift—my feet hurt a little."

Father Blossom opened the door and motioned the lad to step in and sit down beside Bobby.

"That's Mrs. Blossom, smiling at you," said Father Blossom, who knew how to make a strange boy feel comfortable. "The three youngsters sleeping so peacefully are Meg, Twaddles and Dot. My son Bobby and I are doing the navigating. We're going to Sunrise Beach."

The boy was plainly surprised.

"Why, I'm going there myself," he said, forgetting to be embarrassed. "My name's Billy Raymond."

He was about sixteen, sturdy and thickset, and, for all his shyness, looked at Father Blossom squarely when he spoke to him. Bobby liked him at once and he was delighted to hear Billy was going as far as Sunrise Beach. As he told Meg later, it was lucky they had found Billy, because it was not likely that many of the

cars which passed him were going all the way to the Beach.

"Do you live there?" asked Bobby, thinking he had never seen a boy look so tired.

"No, I'm trying to get a job," Billy answered.

"But where do you live?" persisted Bobby.

"Don't have to answer questions unless you wish to," Father Blossom said to Billy, and Bobby blushed a little.

"I—I didn't mean to be fresh," he apologized.

"You're all right," Billy assured him. "I don't mind telling you anything you want to know. I don't exactly live anywhere, though for the last two years I've been working on a farm for my keep. This summer I thought I ought to work for cash and buy myself some clothes, so I can get a decent job this winter."

"What will you do at Sunrise Beach?" asked Mother Blossom gently.

Billy turned around and smiled at her.

"Why, I've heard there are plenty of jobs at a summer resort, ma'am," he answered. "I'm figuring on working for some of the boardwalk stands, or maybe in a hotel. I'm not worried

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about getting a job, but I sure was beginning to think it would be September before I got to the Beach. I've been walking for two days now, and I was about ready to lay off somewhere to-morrow and try to rest a bit."

Bobby glanced at Billy's shoes. They were patched and scuffed. But Billy's face as he looked at the fields rolling past and felt the breeze ruffling his yellow hair, was perfectly serene and content.

"Who's that?" demanded Twaddles, waking up, as he did everything, suddenly.

"This is Billy Raymond, Son," Father Blossom said. "I introduced you to him while you were asleep."

"He's going to Sunrise Beach to get a job," Bobby added.

Meg sat up, rubbing her eyes, and Dot, waking, too, stared at the stranger.

"Daddy, we're all thirsty," suggested Mother Blossom. "Have we time to stop for a nice cool drink of something?"

Father Blossom drew up before a green and white stand. When Bobby saw how eagerly

Billy Raymond drank a bottle of soda water and how he tried to pretend that he wasn't really thirsty at all, he realized that his mother had suggested the stop more for Billy's sake than for any other reason.

"I guess you get awfully thirsty and hot, walking so far," thought Bobby. "And when you're hunting for a job I guess you don't buy yourself soda water. You try to save your money."

It seemed cooler after the stop, and when they passed a signpost that read "Sunrise Beach, 3 miles," Twaddles almost fell out of the window, trying to be the first to see the ocean.

"If you could let me out here, I'll be all right," said Billy Raymond, as they came to the first scattering of houses and cottages.

"Sure you know where you're going to spend the night?" asked Father Blossom, just as he might have spoken to Bobby. "All right, then, be sure you look us up. We're at the Seaview."

Billy Raymond said good-by to them all and they drove on to find the Seaview Hotel.

CHAPTER VII

SUNRISE BEACH

IT was a little after six o'clock and, of course, still quite light. The four little Blossoms looked interestedly at the houses and shops as Father Blossom drove down the main street, which was a broad thoroughfare, with lawns and flower beds in front of the boarding houses and hotels.

"I see it!" cried Bobby presently. "There's the Seaview, Daddy."

"Where's the sea?" Twaddles asked, and Meg and Bobby shouted with laughter.

"Well, the Mountain House didn't have any mountain," said Twaddles, trying to look dignified.

"There's the ocean, dear—over to your left," Mother Blossom said, as the car turned into a smooth white driveway.

Sure enough, dark blue and very quiet and

looking miles and miles wide, the beautiful ocean was spread out for Twaddles to see.

"Let's go down on the beach," suggested Dot, who was only now thoroughly awake from her nap.

"Perhaps we'll take a short walk after dinner—we'll decide that later," Father Blossom answered, helping them out of the car.

A colored porter took their baggage and led them up the steps. Daddy Blossom had only to register in the book at the desk and then they were whisked upstairs in a tiny brown and blue elevator, for the hotel people had known they were coming and were expecting them.

There was a large bedroom, overlooking the ocean, for Mother and Father Blossom; a smaller room, connecting, for Meg and Dot and a room across the hall where Bobby and Twaddles were to sleep. Twaddles had to promise his mother faithfully that he wouldn't sleep on the floor before she was willing to let the two boys room alone.

"Hear the ocean talk," said Dot when, a few

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minutes later, they went down to the dining room for dinner.

The windows of the dining room opened on a large porch and the roar of the ocean could be heard plainly. Dot thought it was saying, "Oh, my, my, my!" with a loud thump at the last "my." Meg was positive that wasn't what the waves said, but she couldn't think of anything else, so she did not argue.

There were forty-three people in the dining room—Bobby counted them. The Blossom family had a table to themselves and a young colored waiter who smiled every time he looked at Twaddles. He told the children his name was Ebenezer, but that he was usually called "Eben" for short.

Eben had another table to take care of, too, and Meg thought it was wonderful the way he kept going back and forth between these tables and the kitchen, always seeming to know when it was time to change the plates.

It was Eben who told them where the bathing beach was and that there were bathhouses connected with the hotel. He told them, too, that

it was perfectly safe for children to go in bathing without grown-ups to watch them, and Mother Blossom said that was one reason she had wanted to come to Sunrise Beach.

"Now let's go down to the beach," said Dot, as soon as dinner was over.

"If Daddy is willing to take you down for just fifteen minutes, you may go," Mother Blossom announced. "I'm going to start unpacking, as our trunks have come. Remember, you'll have several weeks to explore the beach, so don't feel impatient that you have to spend some of the time in sleep, Dot."

The four little Blossoms sniffed delightedly as soon as they were out in the air. A strong wind was blowing in from the sea and they needed their sweaters. The wind tasted salty on their lips and they smiled at each other in content. This was the seashore!

They had a little walk on the boardwalk and then, though not one of them wanted to leave the gay crowds of people walking up and down and though they had not seen the brightly lighted shops nor put their feet into the lovely trickling

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sand over which the incoming tide was beginning to spread, the four little Blossoms turned cheerfully when Father Blossom gave the word and marched back to the hotel.

"The very best children in the world," said Mother Blossom approvingly. "To-morrow you'll be as happy as the day is long."

That happy next day began early in the morning. The twins and Meg and Bobby were up and dressed an hour before breakfast. Mother Blossom said they might go down on the beach if they would be careful not to get their shoes wet and that she or Father Blossom would come and call them when breakfast was ready.

"Isn't it nice!" cried Meg, as they went down the first steps they came to, leading from the boardwalk to the sand.

It was so early that no one else was on the beach. A winking, fiery-red sun, which looked as though it might have risen right out of the ocean, was making the water dazzling to look at. Little waves ran gently up on the sand and just as gently ran back again. Sand crabs scuttled across the firm brown sand where the tide had

been during the night. Beautiful gulls swooped low over the water or walked sedately along the shore.

"Watch me catch a crab!" shouted Twaddles, setting off on a run after one of the funny pale gray crabs that can run much faster than any small boy.

Of course Twaddles couldn't catch a sand crab, but he never gave up the idea. As long as the four little Blossoms stayed at Sunrise Beach, Twaddles tried to catch crabs and he could be seen twenty times a day dashing madly after the queer creatures. It grew to be something of a joke after a while, and all the people at the hotel liked to say, "Hello, Twaddles—caught a sand crab yet?"

"The ocean isn't talking now," Dot said softly, staring at it as though she might be trying to overhear any whisper.

Bobby had spied an abandoned pier and he thought that it might be a good place to fish. Both he and his daddy wished to fish, and Bobby thought that if he could only catch a fish and bring it to his mother and then have it cooked

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for her supper, he would have the best vacation he had ever had.

"There's Daddy!" cried Dot, as Bobby was starting toward the old pier.

"Breakfast must be ready," Meg said, and at that magic word the children discovered they were "starving."

"Good morning, good morning," Eben greeted them in the dining room. "Lovely morning, isn't it? I saw you going down to the beach as I was coming to work."

Twaddles, waiting for his mother to fix his cereal—left to himself Twaddles was apt to forget that too much sugar really is not good for one—immediately began to ask questions.

"Where do you live, Eben? Don't you live here? Is it hard work to be a waiter? Do you like it? Isn't it cold in winter?"

"I think Eben likes to be a waiter when there are no children at his table," said Father Blossom significantly.

"No sir, no sir, I likes children," Eben declared, showing his strong white teeth in a wide smile. "Children is lively and I get cheered

up listening to 'em. Then I like to see them eat."

Father and Mother Blossom looked at each other and laughed.

"Ours have good appetites," Father Blossom chuckled. "If watching children eat and listening to them talk cheers you up, Eben, you won't have a gloomy day while we're here."

Eben, though he was busy waiting on the guests at his other table, found time to answer Twaddles' questions, too. He told him that he and most of the other waiters lived in a large cottage at the edge of the town. As soon as their work in the dining room was over, they were free to spend their time as they pleased. Yes, he liked to be a waiter, though the work was hard when the hotel was crowded. No, he was never cold, because he spent his winters in Florida. He waited on the table in another hotel down there.

The four little Blossoms were charmed with this arrangement. Even after breakfast was over and they were walking uptown with Mother Blossom, who wanted to see the town

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and find the post-office, they kept talking about how nice it must be to be a waiter in a seashore hotel in the summer time and stay in Florida during the winter.

"I think," said Meg, "that Billy Raymond ought to be a waiter."

"Oh, no, darling," Mother Blossom protested. "Billy wants to do something else. He needs a job where he can study evenings. This going back and forth between Sunrise Beach and Florida wouldn't be good for him; it's too unsettling for a boy of his age."

The four little Blossoms were rather disappointed that they didn't see anything of Billy Raymond while they were uptown. They watched carefully, but not a glimpse of his sunburned face and yellow hair did they see. But they found the post-office and a place where ice-cream cones were sold and a book store, and a fancy-work shop where Mother Blossom said she would probably send them to match embroidery silks for her.

Sunrise Beach was a quaint and friendly town. The people there had a habit of saying "Good

morning" to every one they passed, whether they knew them or not. The streets were rather narrow and some of the traffic overflowed on the sidewalks, but no one seemed to mind. The boys on bicycles went slowly and did not run into people. Women, in sunbonnets and pretty gingham dresses, drove vegetable and fresh fish around in carts and there was even a girl trundling a wheelbarrow filled with bouquets which, she said when Mother Blossom admired her flowers, she was taking to one of the hotels.

"When are we going bathing?" asked Twaddles anxiously some dozen times during that walk.

Mother Blossom had told him he might put on his bathing suit before luncheon, but on their way back to the hotel she said she had changed her mind.

"Daddy is never sure that he won't be called back to the foundry," she told the four little Blossoms, "and he is anxious to take us for a ride down the coast. I think it will please him if we have an early lunch and go driving this after-

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noon. Then the first thing you do after breakfast to-morrow will be to go bathing."

It seemed that Father Blossom did want to drive along the shore road, and he was plainly pleased when this plan was suggested to him. They went into the dining room as soon as the doors were open and Eben waited on them quickly, so quickly, in fact, that they had finished before the people at his other table came in.

"Got lots of new folks for to-night," said Eben, who liked to talk as much as he liked to listen. "All new folks at my other table—coming on this afternoon train."

"Maybe there will be some children to cheer you up," said Dot politely.

"Maybe there will be six children," Twaddles added for good measure.

There were only six chairs at the other table.

Father Blossom laughed and said he thought Eben could manage without any more cheering up and then the dessert came in. It was apple pie with ice cream, and that cheered the four little Blossoms so much that they fairly beamed.

They had a beautiful drive along a road that was wide enough for a double line of cars going in each direction. It was built along the ocean for several miles and then suddenly crossed a bay. To cross this bay the cars went over a magnificent long bridge and the four little Blossoms felt as though they were out in the middle of the ocean, for there was water on either side of them. They came home by another route, through the country where the farmers were busily digging potatoes, and Bobby rather thought he might be a farmer himself some day.

It was Twaddles who remembered what Eben had said, as soon as they came in sight of the hotel late that afternoon.

"I do hope there will be six children," said Twaddles sedately, and he could hardly wait for half-past six to come, when the dining room doors were opened.

"Where are they?" he asked loudly and clearly, the moment he had reached his table and saw Eben hurrying to pull out his chair.

CHAPTER VIII

NEW FRIENDS

“**W**HERE are what?” asked Eben, whose grammar was certainly careless.

Meg instantly decided that it wouldn't be good for Billy Raymond to be a waiter, because he might not have time to study grammar.

“The six children,” Twaddles answered, who when once he had an idea in his head, held fast to it.

Eben began to smile, but he said nothing as he went on helping Dot into her chair and pushing the little footstool under Mother Blossom's feet.

Twaddles stared disappointedly toward the other table. There were different people sitting there and it was evident that the ones who had been there the first night had gone home. But no children sat in the chairs and Twaddles thought that no grown-ups could possibly interest him.

Meg and Dot and Bobby looked over and saw a young and pretty woman, a pretty little old lady, a young man who (sad to relate) made a face at Twaddles, and three gray-haired men.

Mother Blossom did not like her children to stare and she insisted that they pay attention to their dinner. The newcomers had been eating when the Blossoms came in and they finished their dinner first. As they went out of the dining room, the young man looked back and waved to Twaddles, who waved a spoon at him in return.

"You all going to dance?" asked Eben, bringing in the salad.

"Is there a dance to-night?" Mother Blossom asked, smiling at Meg, who loved to be wherever there was music.

"Dance most every night in the Casino," explained Eben. "Now Miss Kitty done come, they'll be special entertainments, too."

He went on to say that Miss Kitty (she, it seemed, was the pretty young woman they had seen) was in charge of all the entertainments held at the Casino. She was a dancing teacher

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and the young man was her brother. The pretty old lady was her mother.

Eben didn't say who the three gray-haired men were, but Bobby discovered later that they were merely guests in the hotel who had been seated at Miss Kitty's table. He told his mother he thought they were Miss Kitty's uncles and Mother Blossom laughed and told him not to get like Eben, who was, if anything, too much interested in people's affairs.

Meg wanted to see the dancing so much that Mother Blossom took her down to the Casino for half an hour after dinner. The twins had to go to bed and Bobby offered to go with Twaddles, who was inclined to be cross. Father Blossom said he would read his paper in his bedroom; so Meg and Mother Blossom enjoyed the lights and the music together. They saw Miss Kitty dancing with her brother, and when the music stopped, the pair came toward them.

"She's going to know us, Mother!" whispered Meg excitedly.

"I'm Kitty Culver, Mrs. Blossom," said Miss Kitty. "I saw your name on the hotel register

this afternoon. Some one pointed you out to us in the dining room to-night. My mother is a friend of your sister, Mrs. Hayward."

"Why, of course!" Mother Blossom cried. "Of course, Polly has spoken to me about Mrs. Culver. Isn't this delightful! Meg dear, Miss Culver is a friend of Aunt Polly."

"My brother, Early, Mrs. Blossom," said Miss Kitty, presenting the young man who had waved to Twaddles.

Early Culver had curly red hair and Meg liked him at once. She rather thought he could be mischievous, but when he asked her mother to dance and Miss Kitty sat down to keep Meg company, he wasn't mischievous at all. Meg wished she could dance as well as he did.

"I'm going to need lots of children this summer," said Miss Kitty. "How many of you are there?"

"Four," said Meg, dimpling. "Bobby and Twaddles and Dot and I."

"Well, you tell your mother I'm counting on you in the big entertainment," said Miss Kitty. "I don't know the exact date yet, but I'm plan-

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ning something larger than I've ever done. Here comes Early and your mother. Isn't she pretty?"

Mother Blossom looked lovely, but she could not stay for another dance. She said she must go home with Meg. On the way back to the hotel Meg told her what Miss Kitty had said and Mother Blossom thought it would be very nice to be in whatever it was Miss Kitty was planning to do.

You may be sure that Twaddles allowed no one to forget that he was to go bathing the next morning. In fact, he wanted to go down to breakfast in his bathing suit and he only gave that up when Father Blossom said he could either stay in bed or dress properly.

"It's an awful waste of time to get dressed and undressed," sighed Twaddles to Bobby. "I'll probably use up most of vacation getting dressed and undressed."

"You might as well say it's a waste of time to go to sleep," the sensible Bobby pointed out. "You don't have to lose your head just because it is vacation, do you?"

Twaddles said no, he supposed not, and pranced down to breakfast where he and Eben and Early Culver quite disgraced themselves by laughing when one of the waiters dropped a soft boiled egg on the floor.

Almost as soon as breakfast was over, the four little Blossoms were in their bathing suits. They had to promise not to go in the water for an hour and to wait until either Father or Mother Blossom came down to look at the bathing beach, and then they were free to cross the boardwalk and run across the hot, burning sand, down to the very edge of the waves.

"You said you'd keep out of the water," said Meg to Twaddles, as a wave came up almost to his pink toes.

"I am out," Twaddles retorted, but he had to run back as he said it, for another wave was rushing toward him.

"There's a crab!" cried Dot, and Twaddles set off after the crab as hard as he could go.

Twaddles was out of breath and very warm indeed by the time Father Blossom came. For Twaddles had chased every crab he saw, and

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as there were dozens of crabs he was kept busy. More people—grown-ups and children—were on the beach now, and some of the youngsters tried to help Twaddles, but not one of them could catch a sand crab.

“Now may we go into the water?” said the four little Blossoms, the moment they saw their daddy.

Father Blossom said yes, they might go in, and he sat down on the sand to take a sun bath. He did not have on his bathing suit, and Bobby was a little disappointed because he thought they could swim far out and leave “the children” in shallow water.

“I’m going in with your mother this afternoon,” explained Father Blossom. “This morning I thought I’d be a lazy old man and watch the ocean while you children exercise.”

Bobby and Meg and Twaddles and Dot took hold of hands and ran down to the water.

Cold? That water felt like ice when they stepped into it and Dot shrieked as though she were drowning.

“Ow!” she cried. “I’m going back! Ow!

It's too cold! Ow! I want to sit on the sand with Daddy!"

But before she could turn around a large breaker slapped against her and the cold water poured over her head and shoulders.

"Now you won't be cold," sputtered Meg, and that was true. Soon Dot was as warm as toast, she declared happily.

They kept going a little farther out, for the beach was almost as flat as a table. Now and then they turned and waved to Father Blossom, who was watching them.

"Wouldn't it be nice," suggested Meg, "if we could walk across the ocean just like this? I think it would be more fun than going on a ship."

Bobby declared that he wanted to go on a ship. Dot was just about to say that she wished she could go to Europe in an airplane, when Twaddles startled them all by jerking away from Bobby and beginning to hop up and down.

"A fish!" he screamed. "A fish has got me! It's a shark! It's a whale! It's a crab! A crab is eating my foot off."

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It was impossible not to laugh, though poor Twaddles was in great distress. Meg and Bobby were sure that whatever it was that had him by the foot, it could not be a whale and it could not be a shark. There was not enough water for either of those huge creatures to swim in.

"Hold your foot up," commanded Bobby. "Hold it up and I'll take it off for you."

But Twaddles continued to hop up and down and cry.

"My foot's all gone!" he wailed. "The whale ate my foot! Ow! I want to go home!"

"Oh, oh!" gasped Dot. "Twaddles is going to be a lame boy!"

"Twaddles will be all right in a few minutes," declared Meg placidly.

Bobby began to think that the shore was the best place for a boy who was so sure a whale had him by the foot.

"Come on, we might as well go back," he said. "Want me to carry you, Twaddles?"

"No-o," said Twaddles.

But when he started to walk back to shore he was more frightened than ever.

"It's still on my foot!" he screamed. "Bobby, the whale is hanging on my foot!"

Bobby lost patience at that and jerked the plump foot into the air. The surprised Twaddles lost his balance and fell with a splash into the water, sending a shower of spray over the others.

"Look what he's making such a fuss about!" said Bobby.

CHAPTER IX

IN THE ORCHARD

TWADDLES struggled to his feet and tried to rub the water from his eyes.

"All you had on your foot," Bobby informed him scornfully, "was 'a piece of string. It was caught around your big toe."

He held up a short length of heavy white cord and Twaddles gazed at it doubtfully.

"It felt just like a whale," he said.

Father Blossom laughed, too, after he heard what had frightened Twaddles, but he said that many people were frightened when they could not see what was hurting them.

Though Twaddles insisted he wasn't afraid, nothing would induce him to go into the water again that morning. He sat on the wet sand and made castles and let the tide fill them. After a while Meg and Bobby and Dot tired of playing in the water and they sat down and helped

Twaddles make castles till Father Blossom declared they must all go up to the hotel and dress for luncheon.

All the rest of the week it took the combined efforts of Meg and Bobby and Dot and Father Blossom to help Twaddles forget the whale, for Early Culver and Eben heard the story and it is to be feared they liked to tease. But when Early Culver's pretty white-haired mother scolded him for plaguing the small boy, Early went off and bought a toy rubber whale for Twaddles on which he could float and that pleased him so much he said he didn't care who said "Where's the whale, Twaddles?" to him.

Usually the four little Blossoms spent the mornings on the beach; but in the afternoons, when the sun was blazing hot, they liked better to play in the orchards. Eben had told them where to find these beautiful fruit trees.

"All the land out back," explained Eben, meeting the four little Blossoms one morning as he was coming to the hotel, "belongs to Mr. Grubb. He raises apples and pears and cherries. He doesn't care if children play round in

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the trees, long as they don't hurt the fruit. That's one of his orchards in back of our hotel. He owns the land the hotel's built on, too."

It was delightfully shady under the fruit trees, and when, as sometimes happened, there was a land breeze and the beach was unbearably hot, a fine little wind went blowing through the grass. The four little Blossoms loved to play in the orchard, and though they happened to be the only children at their hotel, they did not feel the need of other playmates. They had each other, you see, and they could always have very good times together. They soon discovered that the orchard directly behind the Seaview was the best place to play and they spent most of the afternoons there.

"The apples are ripe," announced Twaddles, the second week of their stay at the beach.

"Now, Twaddles, you've been saying that every day since you found the orchard," Mother Blossom reminded him.

"No, but they really are ripe, Mother," said Twaddles earnestly.

"You mustn't pick them—they don't belong to you," Father Blossom warned him.

But a few minutes later Twaddles ran back to the hotel to report that Early Culver said Mr. Grubb was his uncle and that "Uncle Grubb" was quite willing to have any one who cared to pick and eat the early harvest apples.

"He says they don't keep and you can't ship apples to market if they aren't the kind that keep," said Twaddles importantly. "So, Mother, is it all right if we eat a few?"

Mother Blossom said that if they didn't try to eat all the apples that were ripe, she thought there could be no objection. Twaddles dashed off to the orchard where he had left Bobby and Meg and Dot and found them entertaining a new friend.

"He came jumping across the fence," said Dot, hugging the slim white dog who wagged his tail while she talked.

"I think he belongs to one of the farmers," Bobby explained. "Did Mother say we could eat some apples, Twaddles?"

"Yes, if we don't eat 'em all," said Twaddles cheerfully.

The dog seemed to like the children and he stayed close beside them. Bobby was the best climber, and he volunteered to go up into the tree and throw down the apples to Meg, who held up the tunic of her frock to catch them. This tunic was as handy as an apron, though of course Meg didn't wear aprons. No little girls do now. When Mother Blossom had been a little girl she had worn aprons to school, she said.

Dot had found some flowers growing among the orchard grasses and she was determined to make a wreath for the dog to wear. She worked busily at this and Twaddles tried to teach the dog to "play dead" but without much success. It was much too bright and happy a day to play dead, the doggie's brown eyes seemed to say.

"Catch!" called Bobby as he dropped each apple.

When Meg's tunic was filled, the four little Blossoms sat down to enjoy their spoils.

"The apples are yellow and sweet and as good as gold," declared Meg.

Dot finished her wreath and hung it on the dog's neck, but he did not seem to like it very much.

"Take it off," said Twaddles. "He doesn't want to wear a collar."

But before Dot could put out her hand a loud clear whistle was heard and the dog bounded over the fence, wreath and all. They saw him running down a green lane, scattering flowers as he went.

"Hello! You look cool and comfortable," said Early Culver's voice.

That young man stood leaning over the fence and smiling at them.

"Was that a mad dog that passed me just now?" he asked interestedly.

"I made him a wreath," said Dot; "but I don't think he liked it very well."

"The ungrateful beast!" Early Culver scolded. "Now, if any one ever made me a wreath I'd be so proud of it I'd wear it down to dinner."

"Oh-h, you never would!" cried Meg.

But Early Culver insisted that he would wear

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a wreath proudly and Dot promised to make him one right away.

He climbed over the fence and sat down under the tree, to eat apples until the wreath should be finished.

"Catch a crab yet, Twaddles?" he asked mischievously.

Twaddles grinned and shook his head.

"What you ought to do," Early Culver told him, "is to catch ants. You could start an ant farm."

"What would he do with an ant farm?" asked Meg, who was helping Dot weave flowers for the wreath.

"Oh, an ant farm is valuable," Early Culver declared. "You keep all the ants in a nice safe place and then you bring all the lazy boys and girls you know to look at them and they see a good example and are ashamed of themselves."

"Are they?" asked Bobby doubtfully.

"Well, they ought to be," Early Culver said. "Of course, you Blossom kids are not lazy, so perhaps it wouldn't do you any good to look at

an ant farm. I don't believe you're still a minute except when you're in bed."

Dot had been busy with the wreath and now she held it up.

"Say, that won't go over his head!" Bobby objected.

Dot looked and saw that the opening in the wreath was much too small. She had made it the same size as the one she had finished for the farmer's dog.

"Never you mind," said Early Culver cheerfully. "I can wear that wreath on my arm. It will be a bracelet. It's fine, Dot."

"Won't a bracelet look funny?" asked Dot.

"No, it will look different," Early Culver insisted. "Put it on my arm, Dot. I have to go down to the Casino and meet my sister."

"Will you really wear it to dinner?" asked Twaddles.

"You watch me," Early Culver said. "I wouldn't think of coming down to dinner to-night without my flower bracelet."

He pushed the wreath farther up on his coat sleeve and hurried off, whistling.

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"We'd better pick up the apples," said orderly Meg. "We can take them in with us. Daddy likes sweet apples."

The fruit was scattered on the ground and Bobby and Twaddles began to gather it together in a neat mound.

"Meg," whispered Dot presently, "here comes somebody."

Meg looked up. Peering over the fence she saw four boys, apparently a few years older than Bobby.

"Hello!" she said a little shyly.

Bobby and Twaddles turned to see the newcomers and the boys began to crawl through the bars of the fence.

"Did you pick all the apples?" asked the first one.

He had a deep scratch across his nose and his hair stood up as though it had never been combed. His shirt was ripped at one armhole so that his sleeve hung half way down his back.

The other boys, following him, did not look much better. Their faces and hands were dirty and sadly scratched from briars, and perhaps

from fighting, because when one of them thought another did not move quickly enough, he gave him a tremendous shove that sent him spinning up against a tree.

"Give us some apples," said the second boy who crawled through the fence.

Meg and Dot would have given them the apples quickly, for they were not anxious to argue with such scowling strangers.

But Twaddles tried to cover the apples with his arms and Bobby frankly shook his head and frowned.

"They are our apples," he announced clearly, "and you can't have them."

"Is that so?" snarled the boy who had spoken first. "You give us those apples and be quick about it. They aren't yours."

"They are so ours," Bobby retorted hotly. "We picked 'em. You go away."

Meg was so afraid Bobby was going to hit the boy—who was older and taller and beyond doubt much stronger than her brother—that she ran forward and stood between Bobby and the other.

"You go away," insisted Meg. "These are

our apples. You can pick some for yourselves."

"There aren't any more ripe," the boy said crossly. "You grab the apples, Tim, and if that little kid makes a noise I'll hit him."

The boy addressed as Tim made a rush for Twaddles and Bobby made a dive for Tim. Dot, who had a temper of her own, shut her eyes and doubled up her fists and ran full tilt for the boy who seemed to be the ring-leader. She was pounding away—and scratching and kicking, it is to be feared, for Dot was a girl and Bobby often said sadly that you just couldn't make a girl understand that it is no fair to kick—when she felt her wrists grasped and a laughing voice said:

"Hey, Dot, I'll be good."

Dot opened her eyes and stared in astonishment.

She had been pounding Billy Raymond!

There he stood laughing down at her. The others were so surprised, too, that they had stopped and were looking at him.

"What are you doing here, Jim Wren?" demanded Billy Raymond.

The boy who had told "Tim" to take the apples scowled.

"We came after apples," he said crossly.

"Well, you go back where you came from," Billy Raymond commanded crisply. "You can't get any apples in this orchard."

"Why can't we?" demanded the cross Jim still more crossly.

"Because you've been told to stay out of here and because I say you're going to stay out," Billy Raymond informed him. "You'd better go before I drag you over the fence."

Billy was stocky and he looked strong. Then, too, the boys knew he could call for help if he needed it. Jim decided that it wasn't wise to argue any longer.

"Come on!" he flung over his shoulder at his "gang."

"The apples are wormy, anyhow," grumbled Tim, as he tumbled through the fence.

Billy waited grimly till the last boy had crawled through and the four of them were slouching off among the trees in the next orchard.

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"I know that bunch," said Billy tersely. "They tried to steal my cap when I was eating in a lunch room uptown. They haven't anything to do except go around and stir up a fuss with any one who will fight with them."

He looked at Dot, who blushed.

"I—I didn't mean to fight," confessed that small girl. "I didn't know I was hitting you, Billy."

"Of course you didn't," Billy Raymond agreed. "You had your eyes shut. You ought to look at people when you're mad at them, Dot."

Meg at last asked the question she had been anxious to ask ever since she saw Billy Raymond standing under the apple tree.

"Did you find a job?" asked Meg.

Billy Raymond nodded his head and smiled.

CHAPTER X

THE "MARY LOU"

THE four little Blossoms crowded around Billy Raymond.

"Is it a nice job?" asked Dot eagerly.

"Do you get a lot of money?" Bobby chimed in.

"Is there anything to eat?" said Twaddles.

That made Billy Raymond laugh.

"Well, Twaddles, as a matter of fact, there is something to eat," he said gayly. "I'm working in a bakery and we have two stores, one down on the boardwalk, the other uptown. I'm merely the errand boy and spend most of my time dashing between the two shops. When I'm not dashing, I deliver the special orders. That's what brought me to the Seaview to-day—I had to bring rolls for your dinner to-night."

"And you remembered we were here," said Meg.

"Yes, I remembered your father said you were going to stop at the Seaview," admitted Billy Raymond. "I wouldn't have thought of finding you in the orchard, though, if I hadn't met your mother on the street. She told me if I had time to come out here and say 'Hello.'"

Billy Raymond couldn't stay, for he had more work to do. But he promised to look in the orchard every time he came to the hotel, "just in case we are out here playing," Bobby insisted, and he assured the children that he liked his job and hoped to be a regular clerk in one of the stores before the season was over.

"I wish you'd tell your mother I have a new suit," he called, as he was going off. "I didn't think to tell her. She was so nice to me that day you took me in your car and I looked like a tramp."

He went away and the four little Blossoms carried their apples into the hotel and up to their rooms. They told Mother Blossom about Billy's new suit and how he had made the rough, quarrelsome boys go away and leave them in peace.

Of course they remembered about the flower wreath Dot had made for Early Culver, but none of them really believed that red-headed young man would come down to the dining room wearing such a thing. So, when they were all seated at the table, and Early walked into the dining room with his "bracelet" on his arm, Dot giggled aloud.

"I made it, Mother," she said in a voice that could be heard half way across the room. "I made the bracelet for him. Isn't it pretty, Mother?"

Miss Kitty and her mother laughed and afterward they told Mother Blossom that Early wished the twins were his own little brother and sister, because they liked to do the same kind of foolish things he did.

"Early would play from morning till night, if he had his way," said Miss Kitty. "How he is ever going to get through college, I don't see."

But Twaddles, who didn't like to work at anything steadily, found, when he tried to use Early Culver as an example why he should not try to learn to spell in school the next winter, that

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much as Early liked to play, he studied three hours every day that summer.

Bobby and his father went for a fishing trip not long after this and they had such a wonderful time that Meg and Dot and Twaddles wished they could go fishing, too.

"I don't think you'd care for that, Daughter," said Father Blossom to Meg. "But I'll tell you what I will do; I'll take you all for a long sail. Let Mother decide when she wants to go and I'll make arrangements with one of the boatmen."

This was delightful, and Mother Blossom said there was no reason why they should not go the next afternoon. There was a pretty, trim sailboat, named the *Mary Lou* and Father Blossom hired that for the afternoon. The skipper of the *Mary Lou* was a middle-aged man with a gray beard. His name was Captain Bige and he seemed to know every one in Sunrise Beach.

"Lived here for fifty-eight years, so I ought to know folks," he said proudly.

"Where did you live before that?" asked Twaddles.

The twins had stuck close to Captain Bige

ever since they had first stepped aboard his boat. He seemed to fascinate them. Bobby was eagerly pointing out to Mother Blossom the spots where he was sure he and his daddy had anchored to fish when they were out together, and Meg was standing beside the railing which was just as high as her chin, watching a sea gull.

But Twaddles and Dot were plying Captain Bige with questions as he sat with the tiller in his hand.

"Where did I live before what?" the good captain asked.

"Before you lived fifty-eight years in Sunrise Beach," said Twaddles.

"Well——" Captain Bige was speechless for a moment. "Well, I'm swaggled!" he said finally. "How old do you think I am anyway?" he asked sharply.

Twaddles looked at him seriously.

"Seventy-two," he guessed.

Captain Bige laughed and when he laughed you could hear him half a mile away. The

twins laughed, too, though they didn't know what he was laughing about.

"I was fifty-eight last birthday," said the captain, taking out an enormous red handkerchief to wipe his eyes. "I've lived all my life at the beach. I was born in the house next to the post-office."

"Well, I didn't know," Twaddles apologized. "I thought perhaps you had lived somewhere else and could tell us about it."

Captain Bige didn't seem to mind being taken for an old gentleman seventy-two years old, for he let Twaddles hold the tiller for a few moments during the sail, and then he allowed Dot to take her turn. He said they would both be good sailors if they had enough to do with sailing boats.

"Is the *Mary Lou* named for some one?" asked Twaddles, who could certainly ask more questions than any two boys twice his age—his own daddy had said so.

"I named her for my daughter," Captain Bige explained. "Don't you think it is a pretty name?"

Twaddles and Dot thought it was a very pretty name, and then they had to hear all about the captain's daughter who was married and lived so far in the south that her father had never seen her own little girl.

By the time the twins had learned about the real Mary Lou and had seen the picture of her little girl, the captain was bringing the boat in shore, for Father Blossom had planned to have a beach fire in one of the coves and let the children toast "hot dogs" over the coals.

The boat grated gently on the sand and the captain held it firmly while Father Blossom helped Mother Blossom out first, then, one by one, the four little Blossoms.

"We can play we're shipwrecked," said Bobby. "This is a desert island and perhaps we'll never be rescued."

"In that case, you might gather some driftwood," his daddy suggested. "We'll need a beacon fire to signal a passing ship for we mustn't give up hope of being rescued."

The children scattered to pick up the driftwood that littered the sand and Mother Blossom

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unpacked the picnic, as Dot called it. Father Blossom set to work to sharpen some pointed sticks to be used as toasting forks and Captain Bige volunteered to build the fire.

He knew just how to pile the wood and where to put the match, and a few minutes after the wood had been collected a cheerful blaze was burning brightly. They let it burn down to glowing embers, then began to toast their meat. There were rolls and butter to go with the frankfurters, and perhaps they didn't taste good, piping hot, and with milk to drink from paper cups and marshmallows to toast for the dessert! "Let's stay till dark and see if any ship comes, Daddy," urged Bobby.

"Yes, I'll get some more wood," Twaddles offered, scrambling to his feet. "We ought to have a good big blaze or the ships won't see it."

"If you'll excuse me," said Captain Bige, who had been enjoying his lunch and who had pulled Twaddles out of the fire at least twice, "I think we ought to be putting back. It looks as though we might have a little storm."

That was enough for Mother Blossom.

Though Bobby declared he couldn't see a cloud in the sky and Twaddles nearly wept with disappointment, Mother Blossom said firmly that they must cover the fire with sand and start back for the beach at once.

"I don't want to be caught in a storm in an open sailboat," she told Father Blossom.

"But, Mother, it doesn't look like rain," mourned Bobby, watching his daddy put out their beautiful fire.

"Captain Bige knows all about the weather," said Mother Blossom. "If he thinks there will be a storm, there will be a storm."

Dear me, the four little Blossoms stared respectfully at the captain. Their own mother who frequently said she didn't believe the weather reports she read in the newspapers at home was declaring that this man knew all about the weather and could tell what would happen.

"I suppose," confided Twaddles to Dot as they scrambled over the side of the boat, "it is because the captain has lived fifty-eight years in one place."

Whatever the reason, there was no doubt that

Captain Bige knew when it was going to storm. Within fifteen minutes after they had set sail on their return trip a sudden gust of wind tipped the *Mary Lou* so far over that Dot was sure she was going to fall into the water and screamed. The sun went out behind a huge towering gray cloud and a roll of heavy thunder sounded like a cannon shot over their heads.

"I never go out if it looks bad," said Captain Bige to Father Blossom, who was watching the sky anxiously, "but these summer storms come up so quickly you can't allow for 'em. There's nothing to be afraid of; though you may get a little wet."

It was reassuring to have the captain so calm and cheerful, but the four little Blossoms soon wondered how much of a storm it took to frighten the captain. Because the wind continued to blow and the thunder came nearer and nearer, and then a great streak of lightning seemed to cut the sky right in two.

"Sorry I haven't got a cabin," shouted Captain Bige, whose gray beard was streaming in

the wind. "There's oilskins under that chest. You could wrap the children up a little."

Father Blossom felt around and drew out three yellow slickers. They were so large that he could button Meg and Dot in one and one he put on Mother Blossom.

"You take this," he told Captain Bige, shouting because that was the only way to be heard above the wind and thunder. "You will need it," and he made the captain put on the third slicker.

"A little rain won't hurt us," he told Bobby and Twaddles, as a spattering of raindrops fell on the deck.

The next moment the sky seemed to have opened and buckets of water poured down on them. The *Mary Lou* scudded gallantly along, but Captain Bige did not talk and he kept his eyes on the sail.

"Don't cry, Dot," whispered Meg, under the slicker.

"I'm not exactly crying," Dot sobbed. "But by and by I'm going to be afraid."

As she said that there was a tremendous clap

of thunder and a ball of lightning fell into the sea some distance from them. At the same time a puff of wind sent the *Mary Lou* far over on one side. Dot decided that she was afraid right then and there, and she let out a roar that made poor Meg scream, too, more because the noise startled her than because she was afraid of the storm.

"I'm drowning!" shrieked Dot.

Captain Bige heard her and waved his hand cheerfully. He pointed ahead.

CHAPTER XI

TWADDLES HAS A SECRET

OF course Dot wasn't drowning. Her feet were pretty wet, for a great deal of rain and a number of waves were mixed together in the bottom of the boat. But Dot wasn't anywhere near being drowned, though her twin, Twaddles, was in real danger for a moment.

As the *Mary Lou* keeled over in the water, Twaddles went sliding with her, and if Father Blossom had not seen him in time and caught hold of his sailor collar, there was just a chance that Twaddles might have gone on sliding until he slid off into the stormy sea.

But Captain Bige was still pointing ahead and still shouting something that no one could hear. Then the *Mary Lou* righted herself with a jar that made Meg bite her tongue and at once the Blossoms saw that there was land ahead.

"Sunrise Beach!" yelled Bobby, exactly as a

shipwrecked sailor might have cried out joyfully.

It *was* Sunrise Beach, though through the driving rain, it was difficult to see the familiar piers and the boardwalk and rows of shop fronts.

"Sorry," apologized the captain as he ran the *Mary Lou* along the pier from which they had started. "I'm downright sorry it had to storm and spoil things for you."

"Oh, we had a wonderful sail before that," Mother Blossom said quickly. "And you manage your boat so well, Captain Bige. I wouldn't be afraid to start out with you in a storm after this."

Captain Bige beamed with pleasure at this praise. He lifted the twins ashore and told them to hurry along and change their wet clothes.

"And mind you always do just as your mother tells you," he called after them.

The hall of the Seaview was filled with guests in dripping clothes, for the storm had come up so suddenly that many had been caught in it. There was a fire in the fireplace and the four little Blossoms didn't see why they couldn't stay

there and dry off, but Mother Blossom hustled them upstairs and insisted they must put on dry clothing from the skin out.

"It's still raining," announced Dot when she was dressed. "I don't suppose we can go and walk on the boardwalk in the rain."

"I dare say we'll find something pleasant to do after dinner," Mother Blossom promised her, and so it proved, for after dinner Miss Kitty came up to Meg, who was standing in the hall, and asked her where her mother was.

"The dates were set to-day for the baby parade and the pageant," said Miss Kitty, "and I've begun to round up the children who are to take part. I want to ask your mother to lend me you four."

There was a large davenport before the fireplace and Miss Kitty and Mother Blossom sat on that for their talk, while the four little Blossoms listened breathlessly. It seemed that a pageant was a play and that Miss Kitty wanted Meg and Bobby to be in it.

"And Twaddles and Dot will be lovely in the baby parade," said Miss Kitty brightly.

Twaddles looked horror-stricken.

"A *baby* parade!" he choked. "Oh, Mother, do I have to be in a *baby* parade?"

"What's the matter, what's the matter?" asked Early Culver, coming up at this moment. "Twaddles, my boy, have you heard bad news?"

Poor Twaddles could only gasp "Baby parade!" while Mother Blossom and Miss Kitty tried their best to keep from smiling.

"I'm afraid I've insulted Twaddles," Miss Kitty explained to her brother, "by asking him to go in the baby parade."

Early Culver sat down on one end of the davenport and drew Twaddles to him.

"Women don't know how to deal with these matters, Twaddles," he said gravely. "We men will have to talk it over. Now you take my advice and go in this parade and take your little sister with you. No one will expect you to ride in a baby carriage, you know."

This was just what Twaddles had thought he would be asked to do and he brightened at once.

"Will any one think I'm a baby?" he asked cautiously.

"On my word of honor, no one will take you for a baby," said Early Culver. "You and Dot will have a heap of fun and you'll see the whole parade without having to buy a ticket."

Twaddles felt better and was ready to listen quietly to the rest of the plans. Miss Kitty explained to Mother Blossom that Twaddles and Dot ought to wear costumes and that Meg and Bobby would have to learn a certain number of lines to recite.

"I'll hold rehearsals every morning in the Casino for two weeks," said Miss Kitty. "The baby parade is on the afternoon of the fifteenth and the pageant will be held the same evening in the Casino. I think the children will enjoy it, for there will be from fifty to seventy-five other children doing the same thing. We want to make the parade and the pageant better than anything they have ever had at Sunrise Beach."

The four little Blossoms went to the first rehearsal the next morning. They found the Casino filled with children. Every one talked at once and laughed and the boys scuffled until it looked as though Miss Kitty could not teach

such a throng of youngsters, even if she got them to keep still long enough to try to learn.

But in less than ten minutes after she had walked out on the stage every one was quiet. She gave out typewritten slips to the children who had recitations to learn, and she wrote down the names of the children who were going in the baby parade in a big book and after each name the description of the costume that child was to wear.

"I have to carry a book when I walk on the stage," said Bobby at the lunch table. "I wish I had my mechanical book that Twaddles put in the airplane. I could carry that."

"I wish I had my doll," Dot mourned. "I'm going to be a Red Cross nurse in the parade and a Red Cross nurse ought to know whether dolls have freckles or not."

Eben was intensely interested in the plans for the baby parade and the pageant. Not only did he like the four little Blossoms and like to see them have a share in all the good times, but he was very proud of Miss Kitty, who had spent

her summers at the Seaview since she was a little girl.

"You all want to be a credit to Miss Kitty," Eben told the children seriously. "And you all want to be a credit to the Seaview. You're the only children from here, and folks will like you to get a prize."

Twaddles developed a tendency to keep his costume a secret. Of course Bobby and Meg and Dot knew what he was going to wear, but each time any of the guests tried to learn from Twaddles what he was to represent in the parade, he only looked mysterious.

"I can't talk too much, because I have to think," he told one old lady who questioned him.

Not even Eben succeeded in learning Twaddles' secret.

"Maybe I won't know you when I see you in the parade and then I won't be surprised," said Eben when Twaddles told him to be sure and watch for him as the parade came down the boardwalk.

Rehearsals every morning kept the four little

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Blossoms busy. They had all the afternoon for play, however, and the rehearsals were fun, too. Miss Kitty usually gave them a recess of fifteen minutes or so each time and then they were free to laugh and talk and run about as they pleased. Mother Blossom declared that she didn't see where the time went and she had to hurry to get the twins' costumes finished in time, but the children declared they were afraid the day for the parade would never come.

Mother Blossom made Meg a new white dress, too, though she had several pretty white dresses already, and Bobby said he thought girls had to have a new dress every time anything happened.

"Why, that's what makes them so nice, Bobby," declared his daddy. "I don't know of anything nicer than a little girl in a brand new white dress. Do you?"

And when Bobby stopped to think about it, he said he didn't.

"It's a pretty dress," breathed Meg happily.

The days have a way of slipping past, and finally it was the night before the parade-and-

pageant day. Meg kept reciting her lines all the time she was changing her dress for dinner, and Bobby was found in the corridor by Early Culver, practicing his part where he thought no one could hear him.

Twaddles was late, and when he was dressed Mother Blossom discovered that he had on one black shoe and one tan shoe. She sent him back to change while the rest of them went down to dinner.

Dot offered to go back with him, but her mother thought she had better not do so.

"What in the world is keeping Twaddles?" said Father Blossom, when he had eaten his soup and no Twaddles had appeared.

"Want me to go up and see, Daddy?" Bobby asked.

"If he doesn't come in a few minutes, I think one of us will have to go up," said his daddy. "He might need some help."

Eben was just bringing in the dinner plates when a ripple of laughter went over the dining room. Every one seemed to be looking toward the doorway.

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"Oh, look!" shrieked Dot.

"Why, it's Twaddles!" said Meg, staring at the extraordinary little figure which stood balancing rather shyly on one foot.

"What on earth has he got on?" said Father Blossom, looking perplexed.

Bobby began to laugh. Over at the Culver table, Early Culver was laughing, too.

"He's wearing his baby parade costume!" Bobby snickered.

CHAPTER XII

A MISHAP

EVERY one in the dining room was laughing now, and as Twaddles came in, Early Culver began to clap. The others took it up and even the cooks in the kitchen came to the swinging doors and peeped in to see what the noise was about.

"That's a mighty clever costume!" said one of the guests, as Twaddles hurried past his table, intent on reaching his own chair.

No wonder people laughed. For Twaddles was dressed to represent one of his famous sand crabs. He had a tight little gray covering that looked like the body of a sand crab, and plenty of long claws that wiggled about and which he found rather difficult to manage in the crowded dining room.

"Look at me, Eben!" he cried, prancing up to his own table.

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"You sure is plumb lovely," said Eben. "But how is you going to eat with all those claws?"

"He isn't going to eat in that costume," Father Blossom declared firmly. "Hurry back, Twaddles, and change or you'll miss your dinner altogether. I suppose you simply had to show Eben how you look, but you're making too much commotion. Run along like a good chap and get into something else."

Twaddles had intended to eat his dinner in his costume, but he was convinced by now that he couldn't sit comfortably at the table in such clothes. So he went upstairs and took off the long claws and put on a clean sailor suit and was back in time to enjoy scalloped potatoes baked in a large white clam shell.

"Wouldn't it be a shame if it should rain tomorrow!" said some one as the four little Blossoms were leaving the dining room.

This was a new worry. If it rained the next day it would spoil the baby parade. Meg teased her daddy to take them down to the pier where the weather reports were always posted and she felt better when she read that the forecast for the

next day was "Fair, not much change in temperature."

The last thing before they went to bed that night the four little Blossoms looked out of their windows at the sky. There were millions of bright stars winking and blinking in the soft dark canopy and that was reassuring. If the weather report said "fair" and the stars were shining, why, there was every chance that the next day would be clear.

It was, too. In the morning Sunrise Beach was flooded with sunshine and the ocean had never been bluer. The light danced on the water and made little diamonds break on top of the waves. Men were out early sweeping the boardwalk and putting up seats for the audience who would come to watch the parade. There was a wonderful breeze blowing in straight from the ocean, and altogether there could not have been a more perfect day for the parade and pageant.

The children had been instructed to be dressed and in the Casino by one o'clock. The parade was not to start till two, but Miss Kitty said it would never do to wait till the last minute to

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gather in the paraders; she said she had to allow time for mistakes and mishaps.

"What's a mishap?" asked Twaddles, waving his claws proudly.

He had dressed as soon as he could get away from the lunch table and so had Dot. Meg and Bobby had gone down to the Casino with them, and Mother and Father Blossom had promised to be in their seats on the boardwalk by a quarter to two.

"A mishap," Bobby explained, "is something that happens. If you lost one of the claws off your suit, that would be a mishap."

Twaddles said "Oh!" and was quiet for three minutes while he thought this over.

"Maybe Dot is a mishap," he ventured presently.

"Why, where *is* Dot?" asked Meg, turning quickly.

Meg had been watching a group of little girls dressed as fairies and for a moment had forgotten her own small sister.

"She was here a minute ago," said Bobby carelessly. "I guess she is talking to Miss Kitty."

But Miss Kitty, who was surrounded by a noisy group of youngsters all talking at once, had not seen Dot that afternoon.

"Well, we'll have to look for her," said Bobby, who could always plan. "Twaddles, you can't run around in that costume or you'll tear it. You stay right here and if you see Dot make her sit down and stay with you till we come back. If we don't come back in time, you go in the parade when Miss Kitty tells you to."

"Where are you going?" asked Twaddles anxiously.

"We're going out to look for Dot," Bobby answered. "She doesn't seem to be in the Casino and if she went out she may not know enough to come back in time for the parade. Meg and I will hunt for her, but you stay here."

They left Twaddles sitting forlornly on a bench, holding his claws up out of the way of careless feet, and went out into the hot, bright sunshine.

"I don't see where she could go," scolded Bobby. "She knows Miss Kitty said they were to be in line at a quarter to two. Anyway, I

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saw her two minutes before you asked where she was."

They looked up the boardwalk. Plenty of people, but no sign of a little girl in the costume of a Red Cross nurse. They looked down the boardwalk. More people, but no one that looked at all like Dot.

"She likes to look in the windows," said Meg doubtfully. "Do you think she might have gone to look at the jewelry, Bobby?"

Dot was extremely fond of beads and rings and pins and she would stand for a long time with her small nose pressed against the windows of the shops where these things were for sale.

"She might," said Bobby, who really had no clear idea of what his small sister was likely to do. "I don't exactly see why she would want to look at beads when she's all dressed to go in the parade, but I suppose she might want to."

They hurried off to the row of shops where the bright-colored jewelry that Dot admired so much was on sale. But there was no one at all looking in the windows and no one in the shops.

Bobby and Meg looked in each and found them empty, except for the proprietor.

"Well, you don't seem to have much to do," said a familiar voice, as they turned away from the last store, uncertain what to do next.

Meg looked up and saw Early Culver smiling at her.

"It's Dot," said Meg not very clearly.

"Twaddles said maybe she was a mishap and I guess she is," Bobby added gloomily.

"Goodness gracious, don't tell me Dot is a mishap," begged Early Culver, rumpling his red hair. "What made her a mishap?"

"We can't find her," said Meg, almost ready to cry. "The parade will start pretty soon, and we can't find Dot. She was in the Casino and she must have gone out when we weren't looking."

"Well, she can't have disappeared," Early Culver said cheerfully. "We'll find her. All we have to do is to think where to look and then go and look there."

He sounded so confident that Bobby and Meg brightened. To hear Early Culver talk, you'd

think he had been finding little lost sisters all the days of his life.

"Where shall we look?" asked Meg hopefully.

"I think that as we haven't much time, the quickest way will be to ask people if they have seen a little girl in a nurse's costume." Early Culver decided.

That was sensible, of course. Meg and Bobby had never thought to ask the people they passed whether they had seen Dot.

They walked down the boardwalk with Early Culver and the first woman they asked said she had not seen any little girl.

Then they asked a man and he said, yes, he had seen a little girl with long yellow curls tied with a pink hair-ribbon. He specially remembered the curls because they were so long.

"Dot loves long yellow curls, but she hasn't got 'em," said Meg.

Indeed, it was impossible to think of the dark-haired Dot with long golden curls.

"Mabye we're walking in the wrong direction," Early Culver announced when they had walked several blocks. "We'll turn around and

go back after I ask this tall man coming our way."

"Have you seen anything of a little dark-haired girl, wearing a costume to represent a Red Cross nurse?" asked Early when the tall man reached them.

"A little girl with a Red Cross nurse's costume?" the man repeated thoughtfully. "Why, yes, seems to me I did see a kid dressed that way; a short little girl who danced and hopped and did everything but walk?"

Meg nodded eagerly. That sounded like Dot.

"Where did you see her?" asked Early Culver. "She's due to go in the baby parade and we've lost her."

"Why," the tall man said promptly, "I saw her uptown a few minutes ago. She was following the man with the trained dancing bear."

Bobby and Meg stared at him in astonishment.

"Where's the bear?" they demanded, as though they suspected the tall man might have the animal in his pocket.

CHAPTER XIII

PRIZES

EARLY CULVER glanced at his watch. "Where did you see her?" he asked the man. "Over on Ocean Avenue? All right! Come on, Meg and Bobby."

"You didn't say 'thank you,' " Meg reminded him.

"Thanks, very much!" shouted Early after the man, who was already half a block away. "Hurry up, kids, we'll have to hustle."

Accordingly they hustled. They ran down the steps of the boardwalk and crossed the street. The moment they turned away from the ocean it was warm, and Meg and Bobby, who had to run to keep up with Early Culver, were soon red-faced and dripping with perspiration.

"Sorry to get you all out of breath," their leader apologized, "but if we are to get Dot in the parade, we have to use some action. There's

a crowd—does it look like a dancing bear crowd to you, Bobby?”

“Yes, it does,” said Bobby. “I think I see the bear, too.”

He was right, and in another moment they stood on the edge of the crowd. A very hot and tired and huge brown bear was slowly waltzing in the dusty street, while a man played a wheezy mouth organ. The man had a chain wrapped around one wrist and the other end of this chain was fastened to the bear’s collar.

“Well, for goodness’ sake!” said Meg, as she came face to face with a small girl who was darting around on the edge of the crowd, trying to find a place from which she could see the bear dance.

The small girl was Dot, and her nurse’s cap was over one ear.

“Hello, Meg, did you see the bear?” she asked calmly.

“Don’t you know it’s almost time for the baby parade to begin?” Meg asked her severely.

“What made you run away?” demanded Bobby.

"I didn't run away," Dot argued. "I went to the door to look out and I thought I saw Mother coming, so I ran to meet her. And it wasn't mother at all, and then I saw the bear going up the street and I wanted to see what he was going to do, so I went with him."

"Don't squabble," Early Culver advised them. "We'll have to get back to the Casino. Hey, there!"

He hailed a passing automobile that had a sign on it which told him it was a taxi.

"Take us up to the Casino in double quick time," ordered Early, piling the three little Blossoms in and riding on the running board himself.

The taxi swung around corners and cut across streets and in a very few minutes had brought them to the door of the Casino.

"Run ahead in—it must be time for Dot to get in line," said Early Culver, paying the driver. "I'll be down on the boardwalk, watching for you."

Meg and Bobby hustled Dot into the Casino, and, sure enough, the children were just forming in line for the parade. Twaddles was al-

most beside himself with anxiety and he was so glad to see Dot that he tried to pat her on her shoulder and only succeeded in wrapping one of his claws around her neck.

Bobby had to untangle them and then Miss Kitty called their numbers and showed them their places.

"Now we can go out and watch," said Bobby to Meg.

They both sighed, feeling that it took a lot of work and worry to "bring up children," as Meg told her mother later.

Mother and Father Blossom were already in their seats when Meg and Bobby reached the boardwalk. There were two seats reserved for them and for the first time Meg began to think she might enjoy the parade. By the time the band started to play and the first section of the parade was filing past, Meg had forgotten all her troubles and was having a lovely time.

The parade lasted an hour. There were dozens and dozens of children, twenty-three floats, and so many babies that no one, except Miss Kitty, pretended to count them. All of

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the costumes were different and some were funny, some very beautiful and others had been taken from pictures so that people were able to guess what picture the child who wore the costume represented.

Dot was on one of the floats, and she looked serene and composed, not at all like a little girl who had almost lost herself following a dancing bear. When the float passed the place where Mother Blossom sat, Dot leaned down and shouted, "Hello, Mother!" and that shocked the other little girls on the float very much. They explained to Dot that you were supposed to keep perfectly still as you were pulled along.

Whenever the people who were watching the parade liked something "extra much" as Dot expressed it, they would cheer and clap. They clapped for the float that Dot was on, but when Twaddles appeared, walking sideways, as he had seen sand crabs walk, the noise was suddenly deafening.

"Catch a crab, Twaddles?" shouted Eben from somewhere in the crowd.

All the people from the Seaview Hotel, who

knew how hard Twaddles tried to catch crabs, heard and took up the cry. Even the people who had never heard of or seen him, began to shout it, too.

"Catch a crab, Twaddles!" they cried gleefully. "Catch a crab!"

Twaddles laughed and Early Culver, who was standing next to Bobby, said he had never seen a crab laugh. But before Twaddles could laugh again, he had passed his family and was making another section of the boardwalk laugh and clap for him.

"He ought to get a prize," said a lady sitting behind Mother Blossom.

Meg and Bobby had not heard much about the prizes, but every one else seemed to know all about them. As soon as the parade was over there was a rush toward the little three-cornered stand built where the boardwalk turned to follow a curve in the beach.

"The judges are there. They'll award the prizes," said the woman who had said she thought Twaddles ought to have a prize.

She was in such a hurry to get out and get

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down to the judges' stand that she fell over Meg and let her camp stool drop on her feet.

"Gracious goodness," said Early Culver, picking up poor Meg and the stool and sorting them out, "she isn't going to miss a thing, is she?"

Meg wasn't hurt except for a dusty mark on her white socks, and she was eager to see the prizes awarded, too. So all the Blossoms and Early walked down to the stand and there they found a great crowd standing perfectly still and listening intently.

"The prizes will be awarded by sections, two prizes to each section," a man was bellowing through a large pasteboard megaphone.

Then he read off the names of the sections and the two prize winners in each—two prizes for the babies in go-carts, two for the babies in carriages, two prizes for the float division, two prizes for the historical costumes, and so on.

Dot's float did not get a prize, but it did receive honorable mention. Down, almost at the end, came the division for the comic costumes.

"First prize in this division goes to Arthur Gifford Blossom," read the announcer.

At first Meg and Bobby didn't understand—Twaddles was so seldom called by his right name. Then Meg clapped her hands.

"It's Twaddles!" she cried. "Twaddles won first prize!"

As Twaddles, still in his crab costume, came out to get his prize, the crowd burst out in that old refrain.

"Catch a crab, Twaddles!" they chanted. "Catch a crab, Twaddles!"

Twaddles laughed, made a little duck that served as a bow, and came off the platform straight to his mother.

"It's a ticket, Mother," he cried, waving a green paper at her. "Mother, I won a ticket!"

Early Culver chuckled.

"That's an order, young man," he explained. "It means Mr. Meadows will let you have anything he has in his store that doesn't cost more than twenty dollars."

Still Twaddles didn't understand, and finally Father Blossom had to take him uptown and show him how many things twenty dollars could

buy before Twaddles realized how wealthy he was.

However, this wasn't till the next day, and before the last of the prizes had been given out the muttering of thunder was heard.

"Look at those clouds!" cried a nurse girl who was carrying a baby. "Laws, I'm going home! In about ten minutes it's going to pour."

The Blossoms couldn't hurry away, for they had to wait for Dot. All the floats had been sent to a certain place on the boardwalk and the ponies which pulled them were unharnessed there. By the time Dot came back to her family, drops of rain were already spattering on the boardwalk.

"Here she comes!" shouted some one, and a gust of wind and a mighty crash of thunder told the crowds that the storm was upon them.

Such a rush of men and women and children as there was! The rain pelted down on the pretty summer hats and light dresses and in less than a minute the sun parlors and pavilions were crowded with people seeking shelter.

"Mrs. Blossom! Mrs. Blossom!" Meg heard

some one calling. "Oh, Mrs. Blossom! I know where you can go."

Meg tugged at her mother's dress to attract her attention. Hurrying toward them was Billy Raymond with a huge cotton umbrella in one hand and a newspaper in the other.

"Come over to the bakery, quick!" he gasped. "It's right over here. You'll be out of the rain."

Billy put up the big umbrella and held it over Mother Blossom, leading her toward a bakery shop which opened on the boardwalk. Meg and Bobby and Dot and Father Blossom and Early Culver hurried after them, and in a few moments they were safely inside the white screen doors.

"Whew!" said Billy Raymond. "I never saw it rain harder!"

"Where's Twaddles?" asked Mother Blossom, counting her children and seeing at once that one was missing.

The rain was pouring down outside and the lightning flashed incessantly. Where was Twaddles and his crab costume?

"Maybe twins always get lost," said Early

Culver gravely. "We had to find Dot and now it seems Twaddles has disappeared."

"I think he is keeping his crab suit dry somewhere, Mother," Bobby suggested.

"I'll bet I know where he is," said Billy Raymond. "There's a little pocket near where you were standing when I saw you—the life guards keep blankets and stuff like that there. I'll bet Twaddles slipped in there so his suit wouldn't get wet. I'll go and get him."

"But you'll drown," protested Father Blossom. "Look at the rain!"

"You can't drown Billy," said the man who sat at the desk in the bakery. "He's like a duck. Go ahead, Billy, and take the umbrella."

Billy trudged off in the downpour, and presently they saw him coming back.

"He's got Twaddles, because I see four feet walking," reported Bobby.

"Maybe it isn't Twaddles, but some one else," suggested Dot.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Bobby scornfully.

"As though Billy would bring any one but Twaddles!"

Twaddles was there and he had taken off his crab suit and was wearing his ordinary blue sailor suit. But Mother Blossom knew that something was the matter as soon as she saw him.

"Are you hurt, dear?" she asked him, and to every one's surprise and distress, Twaddles burst into tears!

"I lost my ticket," he sobbed. "I lost my first prize ticket!"

CHAPTER XIV

SHOPPING

"**T**HERE! There!" said Mother Blossom soothingly. "Don't cry, Twaddles. We'll find the ticket."

"No it's gone," Twaddles mourned. "I dropped it down a crack in the boardwalk and when I went down to look for it, it wasn't there."

"Don't waste any tears on that green ticket, Twaddles," said Early Culver cheerfully. "I'll call up Mr. Meadows as soon as the storm stops and tell him about it. Then, if any one should find it and try to spend it, he couldn't. Mr. Meadows will give you another ticket and you'll be all right."

Twaddles remembered that Early Culver and his sister, Miss Kitty, knew practically every one in Sunrise Beach. Mr. Meadows would be sure to do whatever Early told him to do, so Twaddles saw his troubles melting away.

"While we are waiting for it to stop raining," said Father Blossom, "and thundering," he added, as a heavy peal rolled over the roof of the bakery, "I think it would be rather nice to have a little ice cream."

The four little Blossoms had seen those entrancing small tables at the back of the store—the kind of tables that make you know immediately that ice cream is served at them—and they beamed approvingly at Father Blossom.

"Come on, Billy," said Father Blossom, putting an arm across Billy's shoulders.

"Oh, I can't," Billy refused hastily. "I have to take an order uptown."

The man at the desk looked over his spectacles. He had a very pleasant face and he seemed to like Billy.

"You ought to know you can't make any deliveries in a storm like this," he said to Billy. "I'll call you when I'm ready."

So Billy Raymond went back and sat down at one of the little tables and a middle-aged woman brought them all ice cream and sponge cake with chocolate icing. The twins had vanilla

cream, Meg and Bobby and Early Culver took peach, and Billy Raymond had all chocolate. Father and Mother Blossom always bought orange ice instead of ice cream.

"Guess it's clearing up," said Early Culver, when the last spoonful of that frozen deliciousness had disappeared. "Looks like the sun to me."

He pointed to the floor, and sure enough a broad band of sunlight lay there. It came through the screen door. The storm had passed and the sun was shining brightly.

Billy said "thank you" a little shyly to Father Blossom and slipped away to take a basket of cakes and rolls to one of the cottages. Early Culver promised to call up Mr. Meadows from the Casino where he was going to meet his sister, and the Blossoms hurried away to the hotel, for the pageant was to be that night and Meg and Bobby had to dress and have their dinners first.

Every one at the hotel knew that Twaddles had won the first prize in his division. They were all delighted with his good fortune and each one he met in the halls and on the stairs

insisted on stopping and congratulating him. They were sorry when they heard he had lost his ticket, but as soon as he explained that Early Culver was to fix it up for him, no one worried.

"What are you going to get with your twenty dollars, Twaddles?" some one asked him.

"Sand toys," said Twaddles promptly and wondered why the man who had asked him should laugh.

Eben beamed all over his face when he saw Twaddles in the dining room that evening.

"I knew you'd win a prize," said the waiter. "You couldn't help winning a prize with a costume like that. The cook's made deviled crabs to-night, just in your honor."

The thought of having deviled crabs made in his honor rather awed Twaddles, though Mother Blossom laughed.

None of the four little Blossoms were allowed to eat such things at night, however, and Eben had learned that. They had creamed chicken instead. And the dessert—which was in Twaddles' honor, too, Eben declared—was something they could eat: frozen custard with little

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crabs made of cherries perched all over the top. Twaddles was so pleased with the cherry crabs that he didn't want to eat them, but he finally did, though he left them to the last to make them "keep" as long as possible.

Dinner over, it was time to think about the pageant. Meg and Bobby hurried away so they would surely be in their places when the curtain went up, and the twins—who were to be allowed to go as a very special treat, for of course they would be up far past their bed time—were all for going right away.

"We have plenty of time," said Mother Blossom. "Let me get my breath."

But as she sat on the porch, getting her breath, a porter came out and said there was a telephone call for Father Blossom.

It was from Oak Hill, and his foundry foreman had called him to ask about a large order that had just been received. Father Blossom talked nearly half an hour with the man, and, though they hurried, when they reached the Casino all the seats were filled.

"We can hear and we can see all right from

here," said Mother Blossom, as they found themselves at the head of one of the aisles. "It won't last very long—my goodness, here comes Meg now to recite. I'm glad we weren't any later."

"Who are the men?" whispered Dot.

She meant the four men and one woman seated on the platform. A girl, who was also standing, whispered that they were the judges of the baby parade and the Mayor of Sunrise Beach and his wife.

Meg came out in her pretty white dress and recited her verses beautifully. The twins were so proud of her that they could hardly wait until she had finished to clap. Meg bowed and looked straight down the aisle and saw them and smiled at her mother.

After Meg, came Bobby with two older boys, and they also recited. They, with Meg, represented the twentieth century boys and girls at Sunrise Beach. The pageant gave the whole history of the Beach from the time only Indians had lived there, through the American Revolution and the Civil War and all the other years down to the present.

Every one said it was a splendid pageant and that the children did remarkably well. Meg and Bobby walked home with their family too excited ever to think of going to sleep, they said. Yet when Mother Blossom reminded them that Twaddles had a busy day ahead of him, they agreed that it might be wise to try to go to sleep so they would be ready to help him.

For Twaddles was slowly learning the delightful truth that he would have money to spend. He had no idea how much twenty dollars was, but he was beginning to understand that he could go "Christmas shopping" as he called it, in summer.

"I want to buy everybody something," he said sleepily, as he tumbled into bed.

Early Culver had telephoned Mr. Meadows and the ticket was to be at the store for Twaddles. All that fortunate young man had to do was to walk into the store and buy twenty dollars' worth of whatever he saw that he wanted.

"I don't think Twaddles ought to buy everybody presents," said Bobby at breakfast the next morning. "He ought to get himself something

real good and expensive so he will always remember the baby parade."

"Well, perhaps he'll see something he wants very much," said Father Blossom. "Who is coming along on this shopping expedition?"

He knew without asking that Meg and Bobby and Dot would go. Mother Blossom said she must write to Norah and if she finished her letter in time she would walk uptown and meet them.

The four little Blossoms knew exactly where Mr. Meadows' store was. There was little now about Sunrise Beach that they did not know. They had been through the quaint pleasant streets so many times a day that Meg was sure she could find her way in the dark.

"Here it is, Daddy," said Twaddles, stopping before a store with large windows on either side of the steps.

Inside they found that Mr. Meadows kept about everything that one could think of. Except groceries—there was nothing to eat in the store. Father Blossom told Bobby that this was a great relief to him; he had wondered what they

would do with Twaddles if he insisted on buying twenty dollars' worth of little cakes.

"Well, so this is the famous little sand crab, is it?" said Mr. Meadows, when Twaddles had been introduced to him and he had given him the bright green ticket that was saved for him.

"I saw you in the parade," went on Mr. Meadows. "I hoped you'd get a prize. I never saw a funnier costume and I've seen fifteen baby parades in my lifetime."

Then he said he was making out bills in his office, and that Twaddles was to go anywhere in the store he liked. If he saw something he wanted, a clerk would wait on him. If he wanted something he didn't see, he was to come to Mr. Meadows and he would try to get it for him.

"What do you want, Twaddles?" asked Bobby, as they started to walk around the crowded store.

"I don't know," Twaddles answered honestly.

But when they came to the scooters, there was a most perfect one, with heavy rubber tires and a new kind of brake. Twaddles was sure none

of the children in Oak Hill had a scooter as good as this one.

"But I won't buy it if it costs twenty dollars," said Twaddles firmly, "because I have to buy everybody a present."

"Oh, Twaddles, no, you don't," Bobby argued. "This is your own prize money. You spend it on yourself."

"I have to get nine presents," said Twaddles, who could be a rock indeed when he chose. "I have to get a present for Mother and Daddy and you, Bobby; and for Meg and Dot and Miss Kitty and Early Culver and Eben and Billy Raymond."

"I don't see why," said Meg.

But Twaddles was determined and when he found that he could buy the scooter and still have half his money left, his mind was made up.

"I'll take the scooter and then you come and help me buy presents," he said seriously.

And buy nine presents he did. He let Dot choose hers and she took sand toys. Meg had a white china cat that was, she insisted, the image of Annabel Lee, Bobby selected a new knife with

two blades. Twaddles bought a scarf for Mother Blossom and a magnifying glass for his daddy. He thought Miss Kitty would like cologne and he bought her a bottle, and for Early Culver he chose a stickpin that was made of a tiny crab. He knew that would make Early laugh.

"But I don't know what to get for Billy Raymond and Eben," said Twaddles, feeling that money brings its possessor much care.

Meg said she thought Eben would like a bright new tie to wear on Sundays when he wasn't waiting on the table, so Twaddles found a red and white one for him that delighted him so much that he came around the next Sunday afternoon when he was off duty to show Twaddles how nice he looked.

"Get Billy handkerchiefs," said Meg wisely. "Two nice handkerchiefs. Mother says no one ever has too many handkerchiefs."

Twaddles went in to say good-by to Mr. Meadows and to tell him that he had had a fine time. Then he put all the parcels on his new scooter and trundled back to the hotel where he

spent the rest of the morning delivering his presents and showing his scooter to all the friends who wanted to know what he had bought for himself.

"Say, what do you think!" cried Twaddles, bursting into the big living room where the guests were waiting for lunch. "We're going flying!"

Twaddles had just taken the handkerchiefs to Billy Raymond and it was Billy who had told him this news.

"We're going flying!" echoed Meg. "I'm not."

"Well, maybe not girls," Twaddles conceded, somewhat loftily. "But there's a man coming and he will take people up in his airplane."

Bobby's eyes began to shine.

"Oh, Daddy, I've never been up in an airplane!" he exclaimed. "Couldn't we go up some day, Daddy?"

"Oh, Daddy, please, no!" said Mother Blossom quickly.

"Well, we'll wait and see," Father Blossom decided. "Perhaps this will be a steady, sensible

kind of a birdman. If he is reckless or hasn't good credentials, we won't go near his plane, Mother. And we may not go up under any circumstances; certainly not if it makes you unhappy."

Bobby talked as much about the airplane as Twaddles did after that. He was so eager to go up that he might have talked about it all the time, only that his daddy told him not to worry Mother Blossom.

"We'll have to wait and see this aviator," said Father Blossom sensibly. "And he will be here for a week or more, I understand; perhaps for the rest of the season. Be patient, Bobby, and Mother may change her mind."

The day when the aviator was to make his landing on the field just outside the town, the four little Blossoms were ready for him. Father Blossom had promised to take them and Early Culver went along. He said that two were none too many because if some one didn't watch the twins every minute, one or the other of them was sure to be lost.

The state police were at the field to keep the

crowds back, but the sergeant knew Early Culver and he found a place for the four little Blossoms right in the front line. They saw the plane swoop down and make a perfect landing. A figure, dressed in leather, with goggles covering his face, got out. He took off the goggles and every one could see that he was young, with a tanned face and clear gray eyes.

"It's Tom Jackson!" cried Bobby in astonishment.

The aviator turned his head and saw the children.

"Hello, where did *you* drop from?" he called cheerily.

CHAPTER XV

UP AND DOWN

THE crowd made a rush for the plane at that moment and Tom Jackson was hidden by a sea of waving arms and tossing hats.

"Stand perfectly still," said Father Blossom to Meg and Bobby.

He lifted Dot in his arms and Early Culver picked up Twaddles. In such a mob there was danger that small children might be knocked down and walked over.

"The police are going to form 'em in lines and send them marching past the plane," said Early Culver presently. "That's a good plan; they can see all there is to see and go on."

A tall young officer came up to them a few moments later and asked them to get in line.

"Don't push and don't shove," he kept saying patiently. "Remember the fellow ahead of you is just as interested in an airplane as you are."

Keep moving, but don't push and don't shove."

The line moved slowly. Tom Jackson had to talk with the people as they filed past him, and answer a great many questions. He had cards, too, which he gave out. These cards had the hours printed on them when he would take passengers up in the air with him, and how much he charged for each passenger.

At last the four little Blossoms reached the plane and Tom Jackson put out a large firm hand that could hold four smaller ones at one time.

"I began to think you'd gone home," he greeted the children. "Didn't I see you once before—over in Oak Hill? Sure I did! You're the Flower children!"

Meg laughed a little at that.

"We're the four Blossoms," she corrected him.

"Did you find the book and the doll?" asked Twaddles, who had been waiting to ask that question many months.

"Book?" repeated Tom Jackson, evidently puzzled. "Doll? What are you talking about?"

"I put them in the plane," volunteered Twaddles.

"My stars and skyrocket, is that where she came from?" Tom Jackson laughed.

In spite of the people waiting to speak to him, he put his hand into the machine and brought out the doll, Betty, who looked exactly as she had when Dot had lost her.

"I called her my mascot, and she sure brought me luck," said the aviator, handing the doll to Dot, who hugged her tightly. "I didn't see the book, but it may be in the cockpit somewhere. You come down to the field to-morrow morning, as early as you can, and I'll hunt it up for you."

The people behind were pressing forward now, and the four little Blossoms had to march ahead. But you may be sure they talked of little else the rest of the day. Betty, the doll who had ridden in an airplane, became famous in the next hour or two and nearly every child at the beach called at the hotel to ask Dot to show them "Betty."

Early next morning, before breakfast, Bobby and his daddy walked out to the field and found

Tom Jackson already at work on his machine. He seemed glad to see them and told Bobby he had found the book in the cockpit.

"None the worse for wear, either," he said, smiling, "because I haven't read it."

"Would—would you write your name in it?" asked Bobby hopefully.

"Why, of course I will! Here, I'll do it now; I've got a pen in my shirt," the aviator said heartily.

He propped the book open against the plane and wrote across the fly leaf quickly in a firm, clear hand.

"To my friend, Bobby Blossom, who likes mechanics as much as I do and who loaned me his book," wrote Tom Jackson.

Then he signed his name and added the date and handed the book back to the delighted Bobby.

"I hope you're going to let me take you up, Bobby," said Tom Jackson. "You and your father. I could take you up first this morning, if you say the word."

Bobby glanced uncertainly at his daddy.

"My mother doesn't like airplanes much," he said sadly.

"Most mothers don't," agreed Tom Jackson. "My mother wouldn't come to watch me fly until I'd been at it for over a year. Now she says she feels more contented because she has watched me and she knows I'm careful."

"Perhaps Mother wouldn't mind if he is a careful aviator, Daddy," Bobby urged wistfully.

Father Blossom shook his head.

"I think all aviators try to be careful," he said. "So we'll have to think up another argument to win over Mother. We'll see. In a few days we may be very glad to accept your offer, Mr. Jackson."

Bobby and his daddy walked back to the hotel and all the way Bobby tried to imagine how it must feel to fly through the air. He had tried it once at home, but without much success. He had stood on the footboard of the bed and tried to fly off into space and he had landed on the rug with a good hard bump.

"I wish Mother liked airplanes," thought Bobby sadly.

He really didn't think she would ever consent to letting him go in a plane; that is, without crying—and Bobby said to himself that he wasn't going in any airplane if it made his mother cry—so he was very much surprised a few mornings later when Father Blossom told him that they were to go up with Tom Jackson after breakfast.

"Mother doesn't want the twins to know about it till afterward," said Father Blossom. "Remember not to say a word. I've already spoken to Tom Jackson and he is to fly low and take us over the town."

"But—but—did Mother say it is all right?" stammered the astonished Bobby.

"Mother is willing," Father Blossom assured him. "She says that by the time you're through school airplanes may be almost as common as automobiles are now. She wants you to be interested in everything that is a step forward and she thinks the trip will be a valuable experience. But I've promised her we won't take a long ride and we won't try any funny stunts."

All through breakfast Bobby was so excited

he could hardly keep still. He wished he could tell Eben what he was going to do, but of course Twaddles and Dot would overhear him. He didn't see how he and his daddy were going to get away without their sharp eyes spying them and those two quick tongues asking, "Where are you going? Can't we come, too?"

But Mother Blossom and Meg knew how to manage. The moment breakfast was over, they said they were going uptown to get some embroidery silk and if the twins wished to come they could each buy a lollypop to have on the beach.

"We'll meet you, near the middle boardwalk stairs, at half-past ten," said Father Blossom.

Then he and Bobby were free to hurry away to the landing field where Tom Jackson and his beautiful white-winged plane were waiting for them.

"You'll be doing this some day, Bobby," said the aviator, as he lifted Bobby into the cockpit and fastened a strap around his waist.

"Gee, I'd like to drive a plane," Bobby sighed. His daddy sat close beside him, but Tom

Jackson sat a little ahead. The instant the motor began to roar, no one could hear any one else talk. Bobby felt himself carried forward and knew when they left the ground for he felt a gentle rocking motion as they swooped up. But once they were in the air, they seemed to move along as smoothly as though they were driving in an automobile.

Bobby felt a touch on his sleeve and saw that his daddy was pointing. My goodness, directly under them was the town of Sunrise Beach. They could see people walking in the streets and Bobby caught a glimpse of a pink dress that he was sure must be worn by Dot. He knew the post-office by the large flag on top, and he could tell the station, for there was a train steaming down the tracks. The town looked very flat, of course, and it was larger than Bobby had thought it. Here and there he saw spots of water glistening in the sun, which he learned later were inlets which the ocean filled at high tide.

After Tom Jackson had circled the town he headed for the beach and skimmed along the boardwalk. People walking there stopped and

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waved their hands, and Bobby waved in return. They could fly very low over the shore line, for there were few people in the water at that hour.

Almost before he knew it and certainly before he had had time to get used to the sensation of flying, Bobby saw the landing field coming toward them. Down, down, went the plane with a gliding motion. There was a slight jar as they struck the earth, the plane rolled forward a few yards and then stopped.

Bobby Blossom had had his first flying experience!

"It was great!" he assured Tom Jackson, with shining eyes. "I never had such a good time in all my life. When I grow up, I mean to have a plane of my own."

"I'll give you lessons any time you like," promised Tom Jackson, shaking hands with him and with Father Blossom.

There was a group of passengers waiting to be taken up, and Father Blossom said they must not hinder the morning's work. And before he and Bobby reached the beach, the great plane was flying over their heads, pointed for the town.

Only this time Bobby did not have to wonder how it felt to be flying through the air. He knew exactly how it felt.

"I went up in the airplane!" he cried as soon as he saw his mother and Meg and the twins.

"Down at the Cove?" Twaddles asked calmly.

There was an amusement park at a near-by beach, which was called an airplane ride, but which was really only a ride in a small boat swung rapidly around on an iron rod.

"No, we didn't go to the Cove," said Bobby. "Daddy and I went up in Tom Jackson's plane."

As soon as the twins understood that they besieged Bobby with questions. How had he felt? What did Tom Jackson say? Wasn't there room for Twaddles and Dot? Did he fall out?

Bobby had to laugh at that. No one who had fallen out of an airplane would be standing on his own two feet to tell about it, he said.

"I had a wonderful time, Mother," said Bobby more quietly.

"I'm glad you did, dear, and very glad you came safely back," Mother Blossom replied softly, and she was so glad that she had to kiss

him even if there were people there to see.

As there was danger that the twins might ask questions for an hour or two without stopping, Father Blossom thought it best to tell his news.

"We're going home day after to-morrow," he announced. "I'm needed at the foundry and Mother doesn't want to stay without me. We only decided last night and that's the reason you have not heard of it before. Mother thinks it would be nice if you had some kind of a beach party to-morrow night and asked your friends, instead of trying to go around and bid each one good-by."

"Ask Billy Raymond, Daddy," Meg suggested. "We met him this morning uptown. He's been promoted. He isn't an errand boy any more. That nice man who sits at the bakery desk has made him a clerk and he gets more money. Billy is saving it, because the bakery closes in the winter time and he won't have a place to work."

Father Blossom said he would go and invite Billy himself, and he set off at once, while the four little Blossoms went to find Miss Kitty

and Early Culver and ask them to please come to the beach party. Mother Blossom invited Mrs. Culver, and Dot, happening to meet Captain Bige, asked him. Bobby made a special trip out to the landing field to ask Tom Jackson. Eben promised to see to the "picnic" part of the party and he told Twaddles that he would speak to the Weather Man and order a nice full moon. Twaddles said he hoped he would.

There was one final, long glorious swim the next morning for the entire Blossom family—the last they could have because the bathing suits must dry that afternoon and be packed that night—and then in the afternoon they all went for a drive in the car that kept them cool and happy and then, at seven o'clock, the "party" began.

Every guest came and had a wonderful time. Captain Bige and Tom Jackson talked "ships" and Early Culver carved funny little figures out of driftwood that made them all laugh. Miss Kitty had a mandolin and sang for them, and the box Eben had packed for their supper was one delicious surprise after another. There was even a freezer of ice cream, and Twaddles, who

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declared he had always wanted "two little dishes" instead of one large dish, had his wish and had the two helpings.

But Billy Raymond was the happiest person there, after all. He told the four little Blossoms he was, and he ought to have known.

"After the bakery closes at the end of the season here," he said to Bobby, "I'm going to Oak Hill to work in your father's foundry. He offered me a regular job in his office, and I can study at night, too. Isn't he the best man you ever heard of?"

And the four little Blossoms, with more enthusiasm and love than elegance, cried, "You bet he is!"

THE END

